

A revised international core curriculum for history, social and cultural studies

Martyn Rawson

Table of Contents

<u>A REVISED INTERNATIONAL CORE CURRICULUM FOR HISTORY, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL STUDIES.....</u>	<u>1</u>
INTRODUCTION.....	2
THE HISTORY PROJECT.....	3
A LAYERED APPROACH	4
POLITICS IS CHANGING THE WAY HISTORY IS TAUGHT.....	5
WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CULTURE?	6
STEINER’S CULTURAL EPOCHS	10
WHY IS DECOLONIZING THE HISTORY CURRICULUM NECESSARY?	12
WHAT IS HISTORY? THE CASE FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE IN A WALDORF SCHOOL.....	13
THE ROLE OF GEOGRAPHY IN HISTORY	15
THE AIMS OF HISTORY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE TEACHING	16
OVERALL STRUCTURE OF HISTORY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE CURRICULUM	16
THE LOWER SCHOOL (GRADES 1-4).....	17
MIDDLE SCHOOL (GRADES 5-8)	19
HIGH SCHOOL (GRADES 9 TO 12).....	20
TEACHING AND LEARNING METHODS	20
AN INTEGRATED SYMPTOMATIC APPROACH.....	20
HISTORICAL NARRATIVE	24
CRITERIA FOR FOCUS	26
A CONFLATION OF STORYTELLING AND HISTORY	29
THE INDIVIDUAL GRADES	29
GRADES 1 & 2	29
GRADE 3.....	29
GRADE 4.....	29
GRADE 5.....	29
THE HISTORICAL PROBLEM OF HISTORY IN GRADE 5	34
GRADE 6.....	37
GRADE 7.....	40
GRADE 8.....	41
GRADE 9.....	42
GRADE 10.....	43
GRADE 11	44
AN ALTERNATIVE	45
GRADE 12.....	46
CONCLUSION.....	47

Introduction¹

This paper outlines a possible curriculum for teaching history, social and cultural studies, within the overall humanities programme (which includes language and literature, art history, economics, political and world religions) in Waldorf schools. In particular, it explains why we need to broaden the history curriculum to include cultural studies, society, politics and civics, economics and art history. The main arguments being that these subjects are all closely related to history and that many of them come too short in the overall curriculum that is taught in many Waldorf schools, given that one of the primary aims of Waldorf education is to equip young people with the knowledge and skills they need to be active and responsible citizens. It also takes account of the fact that we need to ensure that what we teach, gives students a fair and unambiguous understanding of the origins and effects of European colonization and the processes of decolonizing in postcolonial contexts.

In an era in which the twin forces of globalization and renewed nationalism Waldorf schools in each country need to find a new balance between local and global perspectives. Therefore, this paper focuses on the possible common and global aspects and each country has to determine what aspects of their national history need to be taught. The key point about this revised version of the history curriculum is that is designed to be a generic framework of global history and historical perspectives that local/national history can be embedded within. History has a general, global dimension and as Waldorf teachers we have a responsibility to address those aspects of being human that are common to all societies.

These general historical processes may not align chronologically, but significant changes such as industrialization have similar effects everywhere, even though it occurred at different times in different places (e.g., in Britain and in Vietnam) under different conditions. In much of the world, modernization was inhibited for many centuries because of colonialism. Of course, history also has its local dimension and focus. The cultural consensus in any country, and this is often promoted by government, places national narratives at the heart of history. This is both understandable and problematic, not least in a world with growing populist nationalism, xenophobia, and longstanding historical conflicts. However, local events rarely occur in a vacuum and local history has always been influenced by other, neighboring local histories and global processes. This includes intercultural exchange and mutual influence, global processes such as climate change but also human behaviour, whether this is colonialism or environmental change shaped by human behaviour. Therefore, history must reflect these crosscurrents and trends.

Following the *Bildung* tradition (meaning the self-formation of the person in engagement with culture in various forms) that Waldorf education is located within, like any subject in a curriculum, history and social-cultural studies serve the developmental needs of the students

¹ References that are not given as footnotes usually refer to literature in the recommended reading at the end of the text.

as persons first and foremost. Historical themes provide learning opportunities for children and young people to develop their understanding of their relationship to the world. This starts with the body, which itself has a history, and includes relationships to other people and the cultural and natural worlds, all of which have a historical dimension. We are who we are because of our personal history and the history of the culture(s) we are embedded in. This is always an interactive history.

One can understand history as an emergent process with trends, without necessarily seeing these as outcomes of interventions from higher spiritual beings or the missions of folk souls. The Waldorf history curriculum is a large extent cultural history, with a strong emphasis on art, and less emphasis on technology, though art, science and technology have always influenced each other.

Today we live in what Michael Zech (2020)² calls hybrid worlds. History is a tool that can be used by right-wing, nationalist, ethnic fundamentalist interests to serve their ideological interests, and this can operate at national level. We no longer imagine that there is a single master narrative that tells ‘what happened in history’. As Zech has argued eloquently, history today has to be multi-perspective and have a world-historical global dimension. The purpose of history teaching, he writes, is “the promotion of a dialogical historical consciousness [that] is a prerequisite for formation of identity, which no longer takes place in a collectively determined or national-historically defined framework, but rather in a field of tension between self-reference, socialization in the cultural environment and human orientation” (Zech, 2012, p.134).

History as a school subject is never neutral. The way historical narratives are constructed, and the way history is structured into epochs, periods or progressions, reflects the conscious and unconscious positions taken by those who ‘write’ history and their pedagogical intentions. The perspectives taken and the content selected are shaped by power relations, ideology and philosophy, language, cultural histories and identities and therefore need to be interrogated to “critically examine issues such as race, gender, class, sexuality and their intersectionality, de-centre dominant Western narratives, include marginalized voices, question human exceptionalism, foster reflective, inclusive and justice-orientated understandings of knowledge and identity”(Deng, et al, 2025)³.

The History Project

This paper arose out of a project funded by the Educational Research Institute of the German Waldorf School Association⁴ lead by Michael Zech, Albert Schmelzer and Martyn Rawson. As well as providing theoretical consideration (e.g., research into Steiner’s ideas on nation,

² Zech, M. M. (2020). *History in Waldorf Schools. Creating an individual consciousness of history*. Pädagogische Forschungstelle Kassel.

³ Deng, Z., Chapman, A., & Gericke, N. (2025). Powerful knowledge, school subjects and the curriculum: an international and comparative perspective. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 57(4), 365-381.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2025.2528744>

⁴ Pädagogische Forschungsstelle beim Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen

race and human rights⁵, the idea of cosmopolitanism in the curriculum, decolonizing curriculum etc.) groups were formed to provide new material for each class from grade 5 onwards. This is of course in German and from the German perspective. To what extent, this work can be made available and in what form, remains to be seen.

A layered approach

The thinking underpinning this approach is that of a layered curriculum (Rawson, 2021, Rawson and Bransby, 2025⁶). This idea assumes that all Waldorf schools in the world share a common educational approach and view of the development of children and young people, including the developmental tasks of each age group. This comprises the macro layer of curriculum. At the Meso level, each country (and school) has to determine the content of its curriculum, taking into account the values of the education, social and cultural expectations and the requirements of the state (or exam system). At the micro level, individual teachers select the material, examples and methods they use for specific classes.

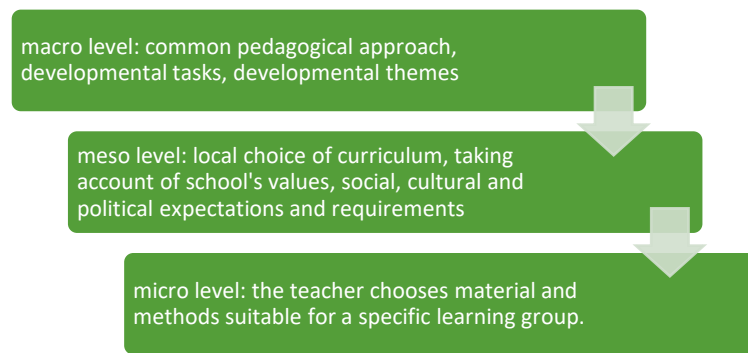


Figure 1 A layered curriculum: the generative principles

At the meso level, there are two factors that call for a more differentiated approach. The first is that preparing our students to be global citizens with intercultural capacities by enabling them to gain insight into the history of other cultures, means that each school has to find a good balance between local, national and global history. The Chinese colleague was joking when he said that China has such a long history that it needed to be taught from grade 1 to 12, and that therefore there was little time for the history of the rest of the world. But with rising nationalism, many countries do in fact require in their national curriculum standards, which Waldorf schools often have to meet, that the main focus be on local, national history. So, to counter this trend with this paper, I suggest an international framework as orientation.

The second reality is that many teachers may not feel qualified to revise their curriculum and teach something other than what existing or traditional published curricula say. Also, many teachers of history have not studied all the fields that need to be addressed and lack the time

⁵ Schmelzer, A. (2025). *Rudolf Steiner im Spannungsfeld von Freiheitsphilosophie, Menschenrechte, Nation und Rasse*. Info 3 Verlag. (English translation of the concluding chapter available on WaldorfWorkingPapers)

⁶ Rawson, M. (2021). *Steiner Waldorf Pedagogy in Schools. A critical introduction*. Routledge. Rawson, M., & Bransby, K. (2025). *Crafting a Curriculum of Coherence. Lessons from Steiner Waldorf Education*. Routledge.

to do the required research. This paper aims to offer orientation and generative principles but cannot provide the detail teachers need. This is a separate task and one that is essential. In Germany groups of history teachers are researching and summarizing material and methods for each grade. To what extent this can be translated and made available as a resource remains to be seen.

Therefore, this paper aims to offer a new perspective. Thus, the following suggestions are made in a generic, that is, international sense. These must be adapted depending on the locality of the school.

Politics is changing the way history is taught

Dana Goldstein writes in the New York Times (27.10.2025):

In the Trump era, history and civics education are under a microscope.

Several major curriculum publishers have withdrawn products from the market, while others have found that teachers are shying away from lessons that were once uncontroversial, on topics as basic as constitutional limits on executive power.

California, the nation's largest Democratic-led state, has passed a law restricting what teachers can say in the classroom, and has walked back an effort to require high school students to take classes in ethnic studies.

To supporters of these changes, they are a necessary corrective to what they see as a leftward tilt in the education establishment. But these developments have also set off alarms among free speech advocates, as the Trump administration pushes to punish speech it dislikes and to impose its patriotic vision of American history on schools.

Among the topics being removed from curriculums are constitutional questions, the history of indigenous peoples, history of African American, Asian and Latino peoples and the civil rights campaigns, gender issues, and anything to do with Palestine. Until recently in many parts of the US and in Canada it was common to start public events, school festivals and theatre productions with words of respect for the Indigenous peoples on whose former lands the event is taking place. This practice is being stopped, along with mention of diversity. The following image was taken from a Californian lesson plan in an ethnic studies programme that has now been removed.



This map compares the loss of Indigenous people's land in the USA with the loss of Palestinian land has been removed from an ethnic studies course. Is such material too political? Is this kind of presentation too polemic and non-factual?

In many countries the process of emancipating the study of history and civics (social sciences) has long since been reversed, if it ever occurred. Often governments are taking a more right-wing stance and removing what they see as left wing, liberal or woke histories that place too much (or indeed any) emphasis on discrimination, exclusion, civil rights of minorities, anything that disturbs the white, Christian, nationalist, majority ethnic narrative. Sometimes this is a subtle shift of emphasis and omission of certain events and facts that the current government does not wish to be highlighted, that place the nation in a bad light. Sometimes it is sheer denial of major aspects of even recent history and sometimes it is the insistence of interpretations that distort the history of certain groups or other nations. Since this process What are the responsibilities of history teachers to offer a balanced view of history?

Though it seems from a certain perspective an absurd question to ask Waldorf teachers of history, but we have to ask, how much honesty, how much civil disobedience, how much truth can we afford, without jeopardizing the school and putting teachers at risk? Answers can only be determined locally in open assessment of the risks and benefits of finding a balance between enabling students to make their own judgements and representing what know we untrue. Steiner asked the teachers to have courage for the truth and sharpen their feelings of responsibility, but he started with, draw on your power of imagination. Perhaps we should add, an ambiguous history curriculum is better than 'official history', or worse, no history and no school.

What do we mean by culture?

Steiner's approach history teaching is basically cultural history seen as a reflection of changing human consciousness as this is reflected in the way people at different times and in different places have related to their natural environment. This in turn shaped how they developed their artefacts, tools and economy, their art and architecture, their philosophies, their how they organized their social relations, their relationship to the spiritual world and their religions. In this sense it is a very modern approach.

Steiner's understanding of culture and his overall narrative of cultural evolution, however, is problematical from the perspective of the cultural and human sciences today. Since it not our

role to teach the ideas of anthroposophy but to offer children and young people a good overall general education that enables them ultimately to form their own judgements and connect to the mainstream world of science and culture, we cannot transport Steiner's views of culture in an unfiltered and uncritical way.

Steiner's many references to culture and cultures and languages (including peoples, nations, languages and cultural epochs) are complex and multifaceted and there has to date been no systematic exploration and critical analysis of the various dimensions and levels of his thinking. In some of his major works, such as *Occult Science*, he mapped out a coherent chronological framework for cultural epochs within a whole cosmology, yet in many lectures this clarity of is missing, and the reader today (of transcriptions) is often unclear which level Steiner is addressing (spiritual, cultural, actual physical and therefore archaeological). Overall, his understanding of historical cultures and languages is essentialist and collective. A group of people are defined and united by certain common, collective cultural attributes, that distinguish them from other cultures and can be seen as having a specific cultural mission within the overall anthroposophical narrative of the teleology of humanity towards the current epoch of the consciousness soul, with its crucial turning point, the Christ Event, which fundamentally altered to relationship of human beings to the world.

What is wrong with essentializing peoples, languages and cultures? The main problem is that essentializing means identify groups of people with innate, inherent, fixed attributes and uniform characteristics that ignore diversity within a culture, overlook the fluid nature of cultures and historical processes generally and can form a basis for prejudice, especially racial prejudice. Making assumptions that people of the same culture share a spiritual outlook and understanding is unsound, since the closer one gets to any exiting cultural group, the more variation becomes apparent (e.g., lumping all Europeans or Africans or Chinese together). The same process of essentializing applies to categories such as race, gender, ethnicity by implying that they have a set biological origin implying certain traits and roles and can lead to stereotypes and misrepresentation. Cultures evolve over time and are almost always influenced by other cultures they encounter, assimilate, borrow from - indeed the boundaries between cultures are difficult to demarcate. In reality, cultural identities and social identities, such as class or caste, are constructed by the people within the culture by either positioning themselves or being positioned by others with power over them. And such identities have the added complexity of intersectionality, which emphasizes how social, cultural, gender, age, or religious identities overlap, which often result in some groups being privileged and others marginalized.

The recent demonization of critical race theory and intersectionality by the Right even has its representatives with the anthroposophical movement (e.g., the Anthro-social-justice project) who see attempts to raise consciousness about diversity, equity and inclusion in Waldorf schools or moves to decolonize curriculum as a betrayal of Steiner's core principles. Changes to the (essentialized) curriculum, for whatever reason, but particularly in order to balance the Eurocentric aspects, are seen as a weakening of its spiritual efficacy. This view assumes that there is a single, definitive curriculum, created by Steiner as a great work of art. In a wider sense, the possibility that Steiner may have been wrong about some things or said inappropriate things, is seen as undermining the whole credibility of anthroposophy and should be resisted.

Steiner's ideas that cultures are guided by high spiritual beings and that each people (Volk) have a 'mission' in the trajectory of human evolution to develop certain qualities and forms of consciousness and prepare humanity for a more enlightened future and to form a counterbalance to those forces of materialism and human egotism, are certainly interesting. In a global sense, it is the case that human consciousness has changed over time, as evidenced by cultural forms. Whether this has a teleology, driven by powerful higher being who guide (but do not totally determine) human history, is a question of personal belief and conviction. When Steiner said the Waldorf School should not teach anthroposophical dogma, as he did on numerous occasions, isn't this because he didn't want the education to be inducting children and young into anthroposophical beliefs (dogma is something one believes in as an incontrovertible truth).

The further back we go in history the generalizing of cultures conforms with practices in history, prehistory and archaeology. It is legitimate to speak collectively of the culture of Ancient Persia (Mesopotamia) or Ancient Egypt in grade 5, even if we need to differentiate this in grade 10, into the different periods, dynasties or locations, and the same applies to other ancient cultures in China, South America etc. It is also necessary to be inclusive and indicate that often many cultures co-existed across all continents, and that whilst some cultures are better known to us, other less visible cultures existed.

For more recent cultures, perhaps after the Axial Age starting around 500 BPE, this generalizing approach becomes less valid. Even terms such as the Ancient Greeks and Romans, the Arabs, the Indigenous peoples of North, Central or South America and so on, need to be qualified. In modern history, the term culture, especially in the high school, needs to be differentiated to reflect the meaning of groups of people with shared customs, languages, beliefs, social, cultural and political practices and self-identification with these. Students should learn that this term is dynamic, constructed by those involved and by other groups designating them.

Terms such as culture and civilization are culturally situated and may have quite different meanings and traditions in different communities at different times, including the vernacular and formal scientific usages. In the Anglophone world today, culture encompasses customs, beliefs, shared understandings and identities. In the German speaking world, in as much as it has not adopted Anglophone understandings, *Kultur* is a more complex term that refers to the spiritual, internal, intellectual development of a people (understood as culturally homogenous group with a common language). Historically the verb 'to civilize' has often been associated with cultivating and raising to morally higher level (usually by European powers). Steiner used this verb in his book *The Education of the Child*, referring to 'I' as civilizing and ennobling the lower 'bodies' of the human being, in clear analogy cultural analogy, when he writes, "Look at the uneducated savage next to a typical European...But uneducated savages, with their I, follow more the passions, impulses and cravings...Working outward from itself it [the I] has to ennoble and purify the other members of human nature"(Steiner, 1996, p. 10-11⁷). German *Kultur* is often contrasted with *Zivilization/civilization*, which tends to refer to material, technical and social progress. In the Anglophone world civilization tends to be applied to the relatively high level of social, technological and political development complex societies, often associated with urban settings, central government, laws, bureaucracies,

⁷ Steiner, R. (1996 (1907)). *The Education of the Child and Early Lectures on Education*. Anthroposophic Press.

specialized professions, hierarchical social structures and distinctive forms of art and writing. Traditionally, one of the criteria for defining civilizations was the invention of writing and other symbolic systems and its use in the organizational structure of that society.

The term civilization should be treated carefully, so as not to suggest a hierarchy of civilized peoples over ‘uncivilized savages’, since the verb to civilize has been used in colonial and racist contexts to imply the superiority of European cultures over local and indigenous cultures during the period of colonization. In some ways it perhaps better to use term like complex societies or societies with complex structures.

As Ruan Wei (2011)⁸ has argued, the terms culture and civilization are not natural scientific concepts and therefore are open to cultural interpretation. Whilst historically civilization has often been seen the ‘bigger’ or even ‘higher’ concept, and the culture as ‘smaller’ more specific, this distinction is not binding or always meaningful. Civilizations, such as the Chinese, clearly have a cultural heterogeneity, having absorbed and modified Buddhism, for example, and along with it many non-specifically Buddhist, Indian cultural ideas, without losing its Chinese identity. Likewise, China has adopted Communism without becoming any less Chinese, in fact it has developed a specifically Chinese form of applying Marxist ideas.

One idea of civilization is that as an entity it absorbs multiple cultures, whilst maintaining a commonality of social and institutional structures, sometimes a dominant language and often deep history and cultural memories and narratives, often conflated today as nation or, earlier as empire. There is a theoretical trend, exemplified for example by Philip Bagby (1963) to draw the distinction between civilization and culture as a matter of scale and the scope of influence of the main institutions. This means he uses civilization as an essentially urban phenomenon and as the outcome of the development from village to town to city, and in historical times, this was related to the number of people who were not primary food producers and demonstrate a high degree of work, task and technological specialization (e.g. writing requiring a specially trained group of people). This obviously ignores complex societies that were distributed geographically (such as the Megalithic cultures of the Bronze Age, or Polynesian cultures).

Fernando-Armesto (2000) has argued that in order to avoid the Euro-centric notion of higher and lower, he defines civilizations are societies that are ecologically and socially sustainable (i.e. they were not dependent on slavery or exploiting other peoples and destroying their environment) and can retain their cultural identity of long periods of time and geographical space, whilst adapting to changing conditions and absorbing other cultural influences.

Whichever definitions history teachers choose, it is important to distinguish between sociological, cultural, religious (i.e. is there such a thing as a Hebrew, Christian, Buddhist or Muslim Civilization?), economic and globalist perspectives. In fact, the issue is essential for any discussion of history and historiography in the upper school classes. It is unnecessary, as Wei (2011) argues, to have a consensus about the exact distinctions between culture and civilization, since both terms offer coherent units of analysis that are not exclusive. What is important is that students become aware of this fact and that they understand that cultural appropriation and hybridity have occurred at all times in history, enriching human lives, as

⁸ Wei, R. (2011). Civilization and Culture. *Globality Studies Journal. Global history, society, civilization*, 24.

well as being causes for conflict. The world religions themselves, often taken as units of civilization, also emerged through cultural appropriation, such as the Syriac (Hebrew) and Greco-Roman origins of Christianity and Islam.

Steiner's cultural epochs

Steiner was very clear that neither anthroposophy nor anthroposophical ideas should not be taught in the Waldorf school. This means that ideas such as Steiner's concept of post-Atlantean cultural epochs, which are not part of the common historical discourse do not belong in the Waldorf curriculum. This touches a wider point that I have addressed elsewhere (Rawson, 2023c & 2024), that some Waldorf teachers see the education as a vehicle for transmitting anthroposophical ideas into the world, or less strongly, believe that Steiner's understanding of history is essentially right and a vital part of his overall world view and should therefore be included in a Waldorf perspective on education. That is a difficult question that in my view crosses the boundary between teachers being inspired by anthroposophy and promoting anthroposophical ideas and practices.

There is evidence that Steiner suggested that the cultural epochs form part of the curriculum, though this is only reported second hand by Stockmeyer from the very first planning discussion about the school (Zech, 2012). It is also the case that Stockmeyer, who as school director was responsible to the Education Ministry and was himself a qualified and practicing gymnasium (academic high school) teacher. One of the things the school had to or wanted to do, was align the history curriculum with the prescribed state school curriculum of the day. This include the cultural stages idea that was part of a long tradition going back to Herder (1744-1803), Hegel (1770-1831) and Herbart (1776-1841), and their followers, who all promoted some form of stages view of history (Wiehl, 2015) and the widespread view that children recapitulate the phases of historical cultural development. Stockmeyer seems to have assumed that this tradition also applies to Waldorf education, though Steiner himself explicitly denied the notion of recapitulation, both in terms of the human embryo as in Haeckel's well-known so-called biogenetic basic law, and in terms of cultural development, describing both as naïve and untrue. The idea, however, seems tenacious and has been widely adopted in secondary presentations of Waldorf education, although research shows that there is no correspondence between cultural epochs and Waldorf classes.

Models of development used in some Waldorf publications that suggest that each grade in school is characterized by a specific stage of development that is matched by the curriculum are, in my view too simplistic, especially if the implication is that a certain content is in a certain grade because it aligns with the children's development. As we know, the normal span of development in any given class is wide and it is actually absurd to suggest that the consciousness of children in grade 3 have an Old Testament consciousness, or grade 4 somehow reflects Viking consciousness, or in grade 6, the children are at the 'Roman' stage. Steiner himself spoke out against such comparisons, pointing out that,

...when we observe the early developmental years of a child, we find nothing that indicates a recapitulation of the... stages of human development. We would have to attribute fantasy forces and processes to the child's development to find something like that. It is just a beautiful dream when people like Wolf [Friedrich August Wolf 1759-1824, author's comment] try to demonstrate that children go through a period corresponding to wild barbarians, then they go through the Persian period, and so forth. Beautiful pictures can result from this, but it is nonsense nevertheless because it

does not correspond to any genuine reality⁹. (Steiner, *Renewal of Education* GA 301, 1920, lecture 4, p. 73-74).

There is no doubt that in a very general sense children go through similar stages of development that humankind did in the course of human evolution.¹⁰ⁱ The key events of the emergence of human ancestors were upright, bipedal walking, language and complex cognition, though these developments occurred over many million years. Our hominid ancestors became upright walkers (and runners) long before the hands and brain became skilful enough to fashion tools, and speech and symbolic language emerged much later still.

¹¹ The parallels in terms of the evolution of consciousness and the child's changing consciousness are less clear and the issue strays into the realm of Waldorf myth and seem to reflect the need many people seem to have for simplified and structured systems.

The sequence of historical periods has didactic, rather than anthroposophical reasons. A chronology in history is necessary and a curriculum that focuses on the consciousness that different cultures express, which is the basic Waldorf perspective, also leads to stages. However, these stages do not have to be those post-Atlantean cultural epochs, particularly the early ones, that Steiner described based on the existing theosophical and esoteric literature and his own spiritual insights. The alternative this therefore to describe the following stages.

Without falling into the trap of naïve recapitulation ideas, it is important to understand that we carry our prehistory within us. That means we also have access to mythic consciousness. It is likely that all children have something of this, which is overlaid with rational accounts of the world (what Hay and Nye, 2006, call the social destruction of spirituality). Human have physically and culturally evolved over countless generations. The experiences we embodied during the long prehistory of humanity are retrained in our intuitive relationship to the world and are embodied in ancient myths and legends and in our language, even if we are not aware of this. What Owen Barfield showed in his book *History in English Words* applies to all languages. Barfield explored how words from our pre-literate language retain a participatory relationship to the world that reflects older, different forms of consciousness. Once literacy has become common these meaning often become fixed. He gives examples of Celtic words, Roman words, Anglo-Saxon, Viking, Norman-French, French Huguenot words and words brought back from the British colonies, as well as and terms from modern science and technology. Names of natural features like mountains, rivers, the sea etc. are often the oldest words, but also words that refer to certain tools and basic concepts.

Learning about history and the history of words can help children reconnect to these unconscious levels of relationship to the world, which is why practical experience and artefacts are so important. (I talk about cultural epochs below in the section on grade 5.)

⁹ Steiner, R. (2001). *The renewal of education (lectures in Basel, Switzerland 20th April to 16th May 1920)*. Lathe R.F. Whittaker, N.P. Great Barrington: Anthroposophic press. Original edition, GA 301., p73-74.

¹⁰ See Rawson, M. (2003). *The Spirit in Human Evolution*. AWSNA Publications. Though much is out of date the second on the early stages of humanity remains relevant.

¹¹ Stringer, C. (2024). *Lone Survivor. How we came to be the only humans on earth*. Henry Holt (Times Books)

Why is decolonizing the history curriculum necessary?

This paper arose out of considerations of the need to decolonize Waldorf curricula. The arguments for decolonizing curriculum have been outlined in some detail in recent years (see Boland, 2015, 2017, Rawson, 2023, Tyson, 2023¹²). The term decolonizing is a metaphor for the process of critically reviewing curriculum to ensure that there are no implicit aspects that reinforce white privilege or Eurocentric perspectives and that colonialism and its ongoing effects are adequately covered in the teaching. In a Waldorf curriculum, this should be done in age-related ways. Early versions of Waldorf curricula from 1925 onwards have generally focused on history from a European perspective and therefore are inevitably Eurocentric and Western orientated. In terms of early history, Steiner adopted the typical sequence of cultures that conformed with 19th Century Middle European belief of *lux ex orient*, that knowledge, civilization and enlightenment evolved progressively from Western Asia, via Mesopotamia, Egypt before reaching a certain high point in the Greco-Roman world. After the development of Christianity in Europe, the development of Europe through the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Reformation, Age of Enlightenment, to modern times was the primary focus of the history curriculum. Because Steiner made little or no reference to the history of China, the Pacific Region, Africa, or the Americas, these parts of the world have traditionally played little role in Waldorf curricula, except in connection with European history (e.g., European ‘discoveries’).

The critique that the traditional Waldorf curriculum is Eurocentric is justified for two reasons. The first is that, if adopted in its German or British (e.g., in Rawson, Richter & Avison, 2014)¹³ form it underplays local history in other parts of the world. Secondly, the premise underlying it is that most of the important cultural developments over the past 2,500 years occurred in Europe (Ancient Greece and Rome, European Middle Ages, the Renaissance, Reformation, industrial, and the emancipatory revolutions (American, French, Russian). Furthermore, this is often narrated in heroic terms. The disastrous effects of colonialism, slavery and capitalism hardly get mentioned in traditional versions of the curriculum (i.e. Heydebrand, Stockmeyer, and their translations). Asian, African, pre-Columbian American perspectives are mostly missing, because this was the view of Middle Europe and the West generally, and Waldorf reflects this, until the emergence of postcolonialism in school curriculum, which started towards the end of the 20th Century. Obviously, Europe has contributed to history, but this needs to be balanced by other non-European perspectives, even in white-settler countries like the US, Canada, South Africa, Australia etc.

I would go further and suggest that it includes ensuring that Waldorf students learn about racism, discrimination, and the struggle for emancipation in age-appropriate ways, as well as

¹² Boland, N. (2015). The globalisation of Steiner education: Some considerations. *Research in Steiner Education*, 6 (Special issue December 2015), 192-202. www.rosejournal.com Rawson, M. (2025). Decolonizing Waldorf Schools: An autoethnographic summary from the perspective of decoloniality. In M. Rawson, N. Boland, H. Hsueh, & L. Williams (Eds.), *Decolonizing Through Waldorf Education: Perspectives* (pp. 10-65). Edition Waldorf. Tyson, R. (2023). Eurocentrism in Steiner/Waldorf education - a literature review and postcolonial critique. *Research on Steiner Education*, 14(1), 39-62.

¹³ Rawson, M., Richter, T., & Avison, K. (2014). *The Tasks and Content of the Steiner-Waldorf Curriculum* (2nd Edition ed.). Floris Books.

learning intercultural capacities. This leads us to the aims of teaching history and social science. The decolonizing issue raises a number of questions.

1. Clarifying the aims of Waldorf history teaching and why it is helpful to include social science.
2. Clarifying what the symptomatic approach means.
3. How can we move from an original Eurocentric narrative to a more global perspective that includes the story of colonialism, slavery and racism and their consequences today?
4. Finding the right balance between local and global history.
5. Alternatives to using Steiner's cultural epochs as a model for cultural history, especially in grade 5.
6. How to go about decolonizing curriculum?
7. Creating a framework for a new core Waldorf curriculum for history and social science might look like?

What is history? The case for social science in a Waldorf school

Like all subjects in the curriculum, history teaching and learning in Waldorf education serves the developmental needs of the students at different stages in the life course, particularly through the way it is taught. The curriculum, here understood as what is taught, how it is taught, when, where and by whom it taught, provides a sequence of learning opportunities that enable children and young people to engage with their developmental tasks within the overall process of individuation. In particular history and the social sciences provide opportunities for identity work (e.g., who we are, who they were, how we came to be what we are now), ultimately how to form judgements in the humanities.

History teaching in Waldorf schools has a strong cultural-historical focus with the emphasis on how human activities both reflect and shape their consciousness. The material (technology, techniques) artefacts that people make and the immaterial artefacts (ideas, beliefs) that people develop, reflect their relationship to the world and also at the same time, form those relationships among children and young people through informal and formal cultural learning. Childhood and youth have therefore always been vital phases in the life course for cultural reproduction and innovation because the next generation brings new potential that interrupts to some extent the process of transmission of knowledge.

There are cultural and linguistic differences in what is understood by the term social science. In some cultures, the social sciences include anthropology, archaeology, geography, history, law, economics, political science, international relations, psychology, and sociology, in others, the humanities include history, literature, philosophy, languages, cultural studies, art history and the arts. In the English-speaking academic world, the emphasis on the social sciences is on human behaviour, societies and human interactions and are often based on empirical evidence, whilst the humanities focus on understanding ideas, philosophy, ethics, culture and religion, human expression through the arts and history. The humanities subjects tend to use methods such as critical analysis, hermeneutic interpretation to explore questions of meaning and cultural significance. One simple distinction between the humanities and the social sciences (from Professor Iain McLean of the British Academy) is that the humanities is interested in the individual and the social sciences in the general. In reality the boundaries are no sharp. In German there is a traditional distinction between natural sciences, which use

empirical science, and *Geisteswissenschaften*, literally spiritual sciences or sciences of the mind.

In terms of Waldorf education, the history curriculum, which has a strong emphasis on cultural history (including art history and even philosophy) showing changing human consciousness, therefore has a traditional humanities orientation. This leaves large areas of knowledge somewhat marginalized that are nevertheless important for students to know about if they are to become free-thinking and well-informed adults. These include economics and international financial markets, politics, civics and democracy, law, civil and universal rights, globalization, immigration (and the refugee crisis), media and social media, world religions. For this reason, I lump history and social sciences together, and include into this interdisciplinary domain, themes like developing cultural flexibility, narrative empathy and other intercultural capacities (see also Rawson, 2023b).

Today historians and prehistorians would agree that there are no recognized universal patterns of social and cultural evolution. Therefore, care must be taken when adopting Steiner's view of history and cultural evolution (a point I take up below). Chronology is of course important, and it is important that students are able to orientate themselves in historical temporal spaces. Perhaps more important than strict chronologies are periods of significant transition, whether due to external events such as climate change, epidemics, natural disasters or invasions, or due to new ideas, and often these events belong together in complex correlations.

History in the Waldorf curriculum is not understood teleologically as a global progression from primitive to complex, lower to higher, nor is it a progression towards some kind of teleological 'end of history'. If students were to get the impression that history is somehow predetermined by higher powers either towards a utopian or dystopian goal, it would take away their sense of agency and freedom. There are trends in history that are important to recognize, though none of these are absolute or universal. One of these trends has been the increasing potential for individualization through emancipation from being embedded in structuring social structures, though this trend is also accompanied by increasing alienation of the individual and a loss of meaning. This process is still going on and postmodern identity work is all about individuals identifying with generic categories. Throughout modernity, this was largely a matter of vertical structures of social class and gender, and the effects of colonialism. In our current phase of late modernity or postmodernity, this is shifting towards greater differentiation and horizontal structures. It into this process that factors such as the manipulation of whole populations through totalitarianism, consumer capitalism and nationalistic appeals to identity, are at odds with the trend to emancipation and individual judgement.

Although the grand narrative of global history has resulted in the Anthropocene, that is, a condition in which human power through technology has become largely instrumental in shaping the conditions of life and the future of the planet, people also have the possibility of developing their own reflexive consciousness of events and their relationships in ways that were probably never available to people before. This is largely due to our access to infinitely more information, to mass education and also to the individualizing of consciousness. This makes historical consciousness something that everyone can develop given the opportunities, and not just a professional elite, and also makes it one of the most vital contributions of education to the future.

At all times in history people had options and could and did manipulate their environments, but never to the extent we can today. Human cultural evolution has proceeded by building on what previous generations and other cultures achieved because there has always been a lateral flow of technology, and other ideas and through informal learning (adult to child, generation to generation). Very few communities were fully isolated for long, and those that were, such as Rapa Nui (Easter Island), did not always cope well. Thus, it is important to stress cross-cultural influences.

Once we have overcome the illusion that history is an account of what happened and accepted that history consists largely of varying interpretations of remote and even recent event by different people from different perspectives, then we can select which aspects of history suit our intentions. We also need to apace with new perspectives on history, that change the way we understand things that were taken for granted.

Some examples of new perspectives include:

- The historian Felipe Fernández-Armesto has redefined the concept of civilisations as those societies that flourished ecologically and that cultures can be ranked accordingly (with modern Western societies being ranked low down).
- Ecological perspectives on history such as those presented by the scientists Brian Fagan and Nadia Durrani, that show how climate change has been a major factor in human history.
- New understandings of the origins of Atlantic slavery and its role in fuelling capitalism, research often done by Black scholars, such as Howard French
- New perspectives on North American history provided by scholar such as David Graeber and David Wengrow and American history from an indigenous perspective, for example by Pekka Hämäläinen.
- New perspectives on the Global Middle Ages, the history of Africa, Asia and China by authors such as Peter Frankopan and Stewart Gordon.
- The changing perspectives on the roles of women in history, such as the research that shows that women in Medieval Europe had more autonomy than later in modern times (see the work of Eleanor Janega and Silvia Federici's work showing that witch hunts saw the start of men rejecting women's knowledge.)

The role of geography in history

Since cultural history is also about how people developed their cultures and economies in relation to their natural environment, geography is a very significant part of history. Why people settled where they did, what they lived on, the resources they used, their relationships to other people and places including trade all have geographical dimensions. Even today, modern economics and the geopolitical relations, geography plays a key role as Tim Marshall (2015, 2021) shows. Economics, trade, agriculture and resources link societies within a globalized world and are thus the basis for understanding history. Human geography is the study of the spatial organization aspects of human activity, how people interact, and how this is influenced by environmental factors, the nature of urbanization, population growth and migration and social mobility all themes central to modern history but also relevant throughout history. It is interesting that the study of postcolonialism and decolonization are core themes in human geography and critical geographical scholarship (see Tariq Jazeel,

2019)¹⁴, and we should be aware of the geographical/cultural meanings of terms such as Orient and Orientalism, Occident, the West, the Global South etc. Geography is just as much the product of people's ideas and forms of knowledge, as history. Both subjects are the result of the culturally situated production of knowledge. This may surprise many people who think geography as being what is there, but the word itself reveal its character- is the way we represent (graphy) the world (geo). It is the theatre we have created in which history unfolds (Carter, 1987)¹⁵

The aims of history and social science teaching

The choice of teaching material serves the overall educational aims of the school, and these reflect the learning and developmental needs of the students. Each subject, however, interprets these general aims in the context of its field and these are structured in age-sensitive ways. The aims of teaching history and social and cultural studies include (see Zech, 2020):

- Developing over the course of the curriculum a reflexive and dialogical historical consciousness; reflexive means identifying the forces and structures that shape human lives and how past and future relate.
- Enabling students to become active participants in society by equipping them with an understanding of history and society.
- Understanding the significance of historical narratives and how they are generated, and how history and social-cultural studies are based on scientific forms of understanding (Verstehens-Wissenschaft).
- Understanding the ways societies express their relationship to their environment in cultural, ecological and technological ways.
- Understanding the changing nature of societies and cultures
- Understanding the changing relationship of the individual to the community.
- Learning to appreciate common aspects of humanity across cultures.
- Understanding how societies interact with other societies and how they mutually influence each other.
- Understanding how societies relate to the spiritual dimension as they experience it.
- Understanding the dimensions of historical time and how history is organized into periods.
- Understanding how historical facts are ascertained and how history is written, including whose voices are heard and whose are silenced.
- Understanding the emergence of national and cultural identities.
- Understanding the emergence of one's individual identity.

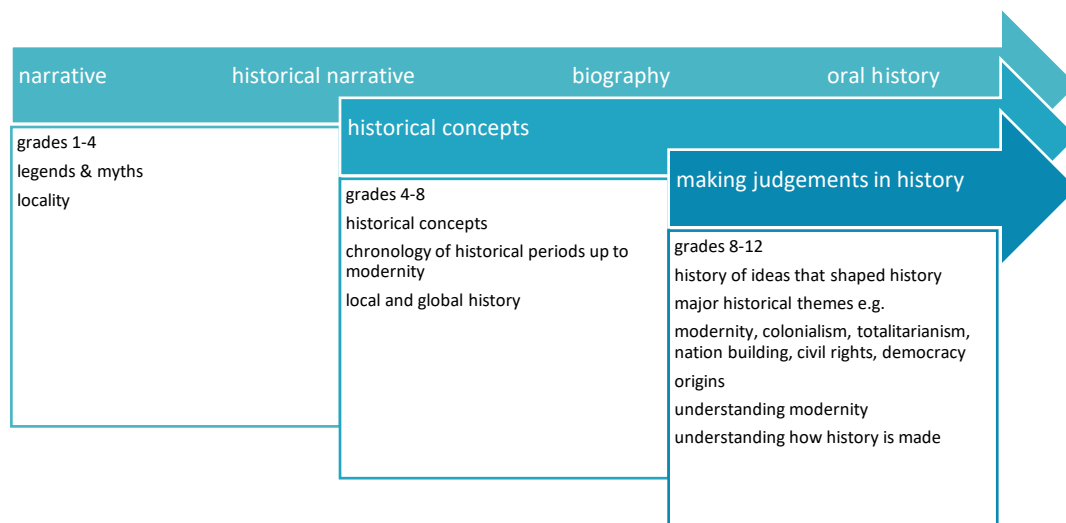
Overall structure of history and social science curriculum

The overall structure of the history and social science curriculum has three phases, each with a different modality, though the first two modalities are continued. History begins with

¹⁴ Jazeel, T. (2019) postcolonialism

¹⁵ Carter, P. (1987) *The Road to Botany Bay: An exploration of landscape and history*. University of Minnesota Press: University, MN.

stories, legends and myths and this medium is continued through historical narratives of the teacher, historical texts, biographies and arrives at oral history. From grade 4 onwards basic historical concepts are introduced and developed throughout the curriculum. In the high school from grade 8 onwards the dimension of forming historical judgements, understanding how history is made and documented and culminating in a philosophy of history. These modalities of teaching and learning are not successive, rather new layers are added at the key transitions. For example, narrative continues but changes from stories, myths and legends through historical narrative- the telling of historical events- through biographies to oral history.



The lower school (grades 1-4)

Stories give children a sense of time since they are often located in the past and in a different historical context, with kings, palaces and simple huts in the forest and an absence of machines.

In grade three the children learn about housebuilding, handwork trades and farming and each of these themes focuses on traditional, manual methods of working, which are manifestly not in the present. In grade four the home surroundings block is not only about mapping the locality but is also about the history of the place, answering questions like, why did people come here? who were the original inhabitants? how did they live? what traces are there today of their activities (e.g. place names, historical buildings)? These experiences already provide a basis for historical concepts, such as the link between primary economies, geography and climate, people altering their environment, trade, simple delineations of historical time (e.g. pre-Columbus, Medieval, industrial times etc.)



Figure 2 In this example of a main lesson book from, a grade 4 in Taiwan, the legend about the founding of the town is portrayed

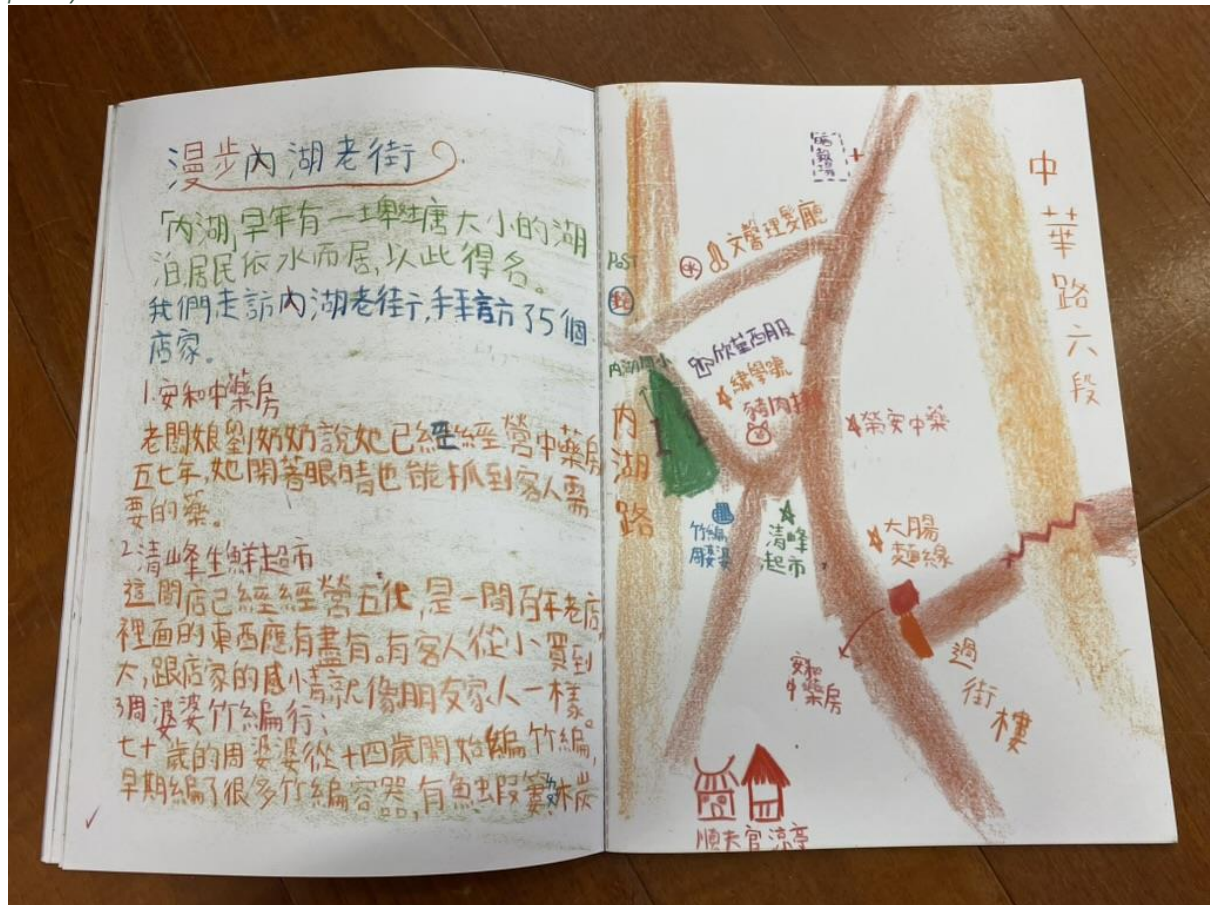


Figure 3 The same main lesson book also shows a map of the centre of the town with historic buildings and temples marked

Middle school (grades 5-8)

Grade 5 marks the transition from indirect, informal and incidental learning about history and the start of a more systematic, teleological focus on explaining the present in terms of the past. This should not be confused with cosmological teleology, which implies that the history of humanity has some specific goals. Historical teleology tells us how the present was formed by the past, including what has been lost and gained, what has been changed and transformed. It is important to bear in mind that human beings embody their pre-history and history, in language, and also in the tools we use, and the way we live, even though these have been replaced by newer technologies. Human activities such as procuring food, shelter, resources, having families, organizing social relations, art, religion, tool making, exploration, interacting with other people and also conflict are archetypes that underpin our world view today and we cannot understand the world today if we don't understand how people live today without understanding how this was before.

In grade 5 students learn about the origins of human culture and explore some of the early pre-industrial states from around the world. This means they learn about how people were highly skilled nomadic hunter gatherers and that this was supplemented by herding,

horticulture and farming and nomadic lifestyles were replaced by sedentary ones, in villages and later urban centres.

In grade 6 the focus moves to pre-industrial cultural networks empires during the Global Middle Ages, which loosely describes the period between Antiquity and Modernity, i.e. the millennium before 1500. The new field of historical research from which the concept of a Global Middle Ages emerged is very much concerned with developments in all parts of the inhabited world before 1500, their connections and similarities and differences (see Holmes and Standen, 2018). For the purposes of Waldorf education, it has the benefit of broadly bridging the period including prehistory up the Romans and subsequent global developments up until 1500 and the period of the Modern Era.

In Grades 7 and 8 the emergence of the Modern Era and colonization leads to industrialization, the emergence of nation states and imperialism, the World Wars and contemporary events up and including the era of digitalization. In many parts of the world, European colonization marks a profound interruption of life for many societies.

In this phase from grades 5 to 8, basic historical concepts are developed and a chronological overview of the significant changes in societies from prehistory to the 21st Century is constructed.

High school (grades 9 to 12)

In the high school grades 9 to 12, history and social science becomes more theoretical in the sense that it focuses on the ideas that moved people in history and the ideas about history that emerged with them. Thus, there is greater emphasis on historical sources and changing theories that reflect the scientific and cultural climate. Students are encouraged to do more research and use their sources critically. The teaching strives to find a dynamic balance between idealism, which young people need, and critical analysis of historical processes, including decolonizing historical narratives.

Given that history and the social sciences are being here combined, this implies that there should be a corresponding increase in the number of main blocks devoted to these themes, or that when aspects relating to the history/social science curriculum are included in other themes (e.g. history of science and technology, history of art, religion, myths etc.) these are clearly signaled and documented as such. This means that history is closely aligned to geography and economics, and also to the arts, technology, religion, literature (including mythology) and biography. Especially in the grade/class teacher phase, history is taught in an interdisciplinary way and therefore needs to be given enough time in the annual main lesson plan (e.g., at least two four-week blocks).

As discussed below in greater detail, there are questions about how to modify the curriculum to allow time and space for the important issues of the present and recent past.

Teaching and learning methods

An integrated symptomatic approach

Whilst the sciences take what is called a phenomenological approach in the sense that students encounter the observable phenomena, such as landscapes, rocks, chemical processes,

heat, light, sound, mechanics and so on and then through classroom discussion, arrive at concepts that account for the phenomena. This is a process that emphasizes exact observation and description. This begins in the first four classes through direct experience of the natural world around the school but also through the accurate and vivid descriptions by the class teacher of animals and plants and landscapes, through which something of the being of the animal or plant can be experienced and their relationship to their surroundings and the earth as a whole (e.g. the vegetation zones of the earth) and to human activities and human nature (e.g. what animals do through their anatomy, humans can often do using technology, or themes such as sexuality or nutrition).

In Steiner's theory of knowledge (Steiner, 1988)¹⁶, he offered a quite different approach to the study of the humanities, in which there appears the fundamental distinction between nature and culture. His view was that in contrast to the inorganic world which can be explained by laws operating on things, in the organic world a further layer is considered. An organism can also be understood as the elaboration of an idea, the type. This doesn't mean that causality is no longer relevant but this new lens to analyse the organic world adds a further dimension to our understanding. As he puts it, in order to understand the organic world we need "another factor besides the facts. We must conceive at a deeper level than the influences of external conditions something which does not passively allow itself to be determined by these conditions but actively determines itself under their influence" (Ibid, p 88). Each organism is a particular expression of a general form that has evolved, "it is the type that establishes the interconnection amid all the infinite multiplicity" (Ibid, p. 89).

Human behaviour cannot be reduced to biological or neuro-chemical-physical processes, though much of modern science does just that in that. Steiner doesn't deny that humans are influenced by the laws of physics -we fall down when we trip, and the movement of our skeleton, tendons and muscles reflects the laws of mechanics, and our body chemistry is still biochemistry. The human species has a body type that has endless variations in size, shape, colour, hair type and we obviously have enough common biology that surgeons anywhere in the world can successfully operate on total strangers. But Steiner's lens for generating knowledge and understanding people is to look at the motivation and how they express themselves. In the human sciences, we don't understand the particular in terms of general categories, but rather we try to see the particular and understand it in itself, in terms of how it brings itself to expression.

Following Steiner's overall epistemology and ontology, knowledge

is the conclusion of the work of creation. What takes place in human consciousness is the interpretation of Nature itself. Thought is the last member in the series of processes whereby Nature is formed. Not so is it in the case of cultural science. Here consciousness has to do with spiritual content itself; with the individual human spirit, with the creations of culture, of literature, with the successive scientific convictions, with the creations of art. The spiritual is grasped by the spiritual "(Ibid, p.100-1).

A little further on in the same passage comes an idea that is particularly relevant for history and the social sciences. Steiner says that how human beings fit themselves into the world is dependent on them and how they find ways of participating in the world. The task of the cultural sciences- he mentions psychology, cultural anthropology and history- is to explore and understand how thinking as spiritual activity, what Steiner calls freedom, comes to

¹⁶ Steiner, R. (1988). *A Science of Knowing* (W. Lindeman, Trans.; Vol. 2 Collected Works). Mercury Press.

expression and the tool to do this is our thinking as spiritual activity. The physical human body obeys the laws of causality, the life processes at work in the human body, which transform into learning processes, enable the human being to develop an inner psychological life including language, which thus becomes the basis for sociality and practical creativity, manifesting in all cultural forms from shaping stone tools to the most complex artefacts, organizational forms and systems (i.e., technology and art).

The idea of freedom in the sense of productive spiritual activity- as opposed to the outcomes of causality, facts and organic types- is not simply the 'goal' of being human, but also the analytical tool for the study of culture and history. Steiner speaks of the development of human personality as the focus for history, but not in the sense of individual traits, but rather in the sense that by virtue of the self-consciousness, capacity for reflection, ability and need to communication with others, questioning and inquiring nature, their ability to feel and be moved by affect and their will to act intentionally and make things and ultimately their agency, human beings are capable of freedom/spiritual activity that distinguishes them from all other organisms. This assemblage of human abilities has manifest in different ways at different times and in different places in history. Steiner's core idea of an evolution of consciousness from an original participatory awareness of being embedded in the world to a more individualized self-consciousness and most recently to the notion of the self-contained, individualistic individual seems to be broadly borne out by everything we know about human cultural history. It has not necessarily been an 'ascent of man' through distinct successive cultural epochs, as envisaged in the 19th century and early 20th, but an overall trend towards emancipation, and we should add the re-emergence of a globalistic awareness of human co-dependence on nature and other human beings, though in new forms, can be identified.

The way to understand human behaviour in history is to explore and try to understand how people have developed their social and psychological experience and which cultural forms this gave rise to. Understanding the human being means understanding the person in the context of their people, their language and their culture and what this brings to expression. Steiner spoke about folk-characteristics and the constitution of a particular peoples, but this is something that we should be very careful with. Perhaps characterizing a people is best done by those people themselves, if they feel the need to do this. What Steiner, in his lectures on history and symptomatology, did was to characterize cultures, events in history and individuals in terms of their spiritual development. Their actions and productions may be seen as expressive of something within them that is coming to expression. Reading Steiner one can often have the impression that this is a teleological view, that is people's behaviour and destinies are seen as a stage on the way to a different, more complete or higher development. This is how he describes the cultural epochs; each epoch expresses the spiritual and consciousness development of a particular culture, 'preparing' the next stage. The ultimate goal in human cultural development is enabling people to attain freedom from all determining factors. Steiner's cultural evolution is way of looking at history from the perspective of the emancipation of the individual.

If we apply this approach in a school context, we do not expect young people to develop the kind of reflexive thinking that Steiner is talking about in his philosophical works, nor should we teach them the results of his spiritual research or interpretation of history. But this is very much what has happened in teaching cultural epochs and in particular art history, as the emergence from a collective consciousness to a more individual consciousness, which culminates in the Renaissance. Steiner doesn't seem to have much to offer after the Renaissance, though ironically, his basic notion that art manifests the spiritual (or in Paul

Klee's words, "makes the invisible, visible) inspired many classic modern artists. This, however, is a very oversimplified and totally Eurocentric view of art and needs to be significantly decolonized.

Symptomatology in the curriculum means using interpretive, or hermeneutic approaches, that are actually quite close to the Goethean phenomenological approach in the sciences. A social, cultural or psychological phenomenon is considered, described in its form and techniques, and above all in the effect it has on us as beholders. We ask, what does this picture or poem or piece of music do to us, what feelings and will impulses does it bring forth in us? What affects does the encounter with a human artefact prompt in us (an affect is our response to what comes from outside, whereas a feeling arises within us after we have perceived, or remembered something and an emotion is our response to a bodily state)? We ask two questions; what brings about these affects and feelings and how does the artist or maker use the medium (colour, form, sound, materials etc.) to bring this about? This is how we approach literature, the arts. History is a somewhat different matter because we are always dealing with reconstructions, and these are shaped by the person doing the reconstruction. But history as narrative, as multiple narratives, tell us both about the events being recorded and the perspective of those telling the story. Therefore, the art of historical narrative is very important, so that teachers recreate a historical situation based on the best evidence they have but also fully conscious of the personal position they take in the retelling. With high school students this process can be made conscious.

One way of doing this in grade 9, for example, is developing a questionnaire with students to harvest the lived experiences of the oldest people they know and then analyse what this tells us both about social life in the past (spanning perhaps 3 generations and sometimes more) but it also shows the students that people's history is very selective and subjective. Thus, they learn through direct experience respectfully to work with lived experiences in an interpretive way. Obviously, this only reaches back 70 years or more, but it shows that the further back in history we go the more we have to interpret the fragments left behind. In grade 10, when we look at pre-history, the students learn the amazing ways in which evidence can be gathered and interpreted, including how the expectations of the scientists involved colour their conclusions. Were the Neanderthals brutal, subhuman primitives or was Ralph Solecki's¹⁷ 'first flower people' interpretation of the finds made in the Shanidar Cave in Kurdistan, closer to reality? Thus, the students learn to discern and make judgements. In fact, the process of making aesthetic judgements is central to both methods.

Symptomatology in the humanities involves an interpretative approach, in which the phenomena are not simply given, as a plant, animal bone or geological formation is, but rather first has to be generated. We need to make the poem come alive from the printed page and 'hear' it, a play needs to be performed, a novel has to draw us into its imaginative sphere, we have to visualize a historical situation, and then we can let it work on us and only then can we start to relate to it and say what it means. Whilst we try to interpret what the significance of the phenomenon, 'hear' what it has to say, this does not mean that there is an objective 'hidden' reality waiting to be revealed, a secret code waiting to be decoded, so that we can say, "this is the true meaning of this phenomenon".

In short symptomatology is an approach to phenomena in the world of humanities and culture that requires a method that does tell the students (or teachers) what to think and how to respond (let alone with the aim of testing them), but in which the triad teacher-student-

¹⁷ Solecki, R. (1971). *Shanidar. The First Flower People*. Alfred A. Knopf.

phenomenon become transparent for each other and therefore capable of transformation. It is not just, as is often thought, set up to reveal some important process going on: “look at this work of art, it is a symptom of a significant new stage of consciousness” or “this historical development signifies a major new stage in the evolution of consciousness”.

Using a structured interpretative approach has levels of engagement, starting with description, then moving on to analysis and contextualizing and finally moves to understanding transactional effect (how does engaging with this phenomenon change me, change the way I see it and how does it change the meaning of the phenomenon?).

The Waldorf approach to the arts and humanities, including history is all about learning discernment and judgement in the field of the humanities and involves three basic phases. The first is experiencing language, history and art in context. The second is learning to discern the qualities of the phenomena (different word types, different text types, different literary genres, different cultures at different times, different artistic media). The third involves hermeneutic interpretation and analysis, including transactional responses. A symptomatic approach involves moving from the particular to the general, relating specific objects, artefacts, events, personalities to a wider context with the aim of showing the changing relationship of people to their world and society.

Historical narrative/history telling

The main method of teaching history is narrative because a well told account of historical events is the most direct way to make the past ‘come to life’. The vividness of the descriptions and relevant historical detail enable students to imagine historical situations and subsequently embody strongly personalized representations. Historical narrative or history telling is a specialist skill that usually needs to be taught, so that the narration conveys the relevant information in succinct form whilst activating the students’ imagination and empathy. This requires fine linguistic skills.

Storytelling and Historical Narratives as Teaching Methodologies

Storytelling in the history class (also called *history telling*) connects past events into a meaningful, emotionally engaging plot that can be multiperspective. It sparks curiosity, makes abstract structures tangible, and promotes narrative competence as a core element of historical thinking.

Functions and learning approaches of history telling

- Instructive: relatively quick delivery and vivid reconstruction of historical situations and of basic knowledge by the teacher, who has made conscious choices about sources, perspectives, can link to what has gone before, and can tailor the narrative to engage the specific group of students.
- Exploratory: Students can extract information and motives from the provided narratives.
- Inquiry-based: Learners can deconstruct and construct their own historical narratives based on primary sources.
- Student narratives: students can tell historical narratives based on information they have been provided with.

Key Characteristics of Historical Narrative

According to history educators like Hans-Jürgen Pandel (2002), historical storytelling features five key dimensions:

- Retrospectivity: Looking back at the past from the vantage point of the present.

- Temporality: Connecting chronological and causal sequences of time.
- Selectivity: Deliberately choosing specific people, events, and perspectives.
- Constructivity: The purposeful shaping and meaning-making of the story by the narrator.
- Partiality: Acknowledging the spatial, temporal, and perspective-based limitations of any account.

Implementation Strategies in the Classroom

- Teacher presentation: Strategic use of voice, pacing, and direct quotes to bring history to life.
- Perspective Shifts: Telling stories from the viewpoint of everyday people or marginalized groups, rather than just the macro-perspective of rulers.
- Media Variety (*Digital Storytelling*): Integrating images, podcasts, short video clips, or role-playing exercises.
- Writing Prompts: Having students write their own historical micro-narratives to practice bridging the gap between raw facts and interpretation.

Types of story telling to construct meaning:

Traditional narrating: the story teller sticks closely to the original sources.

Genetic narrating: the story constructs an account starting in the past that explains the origins and development of something up to the present (or some key point in the past).

Teleological narrating: the story shows how something emerged in the past (e.g. civil rights, women's emancipation, democracy) and shows how this can continue into the future.

Cyclical narratives: the story shows the cyclic nature of events as recurrence ,or as rise and fall (e.g. of empires, of religious cultures etc.)

Organic narrating: the story history as an ongoing process of becoming, but also natural waxing and waning.

Narration is part of the overall learning process, in which the story is told and then recalled in the next lesson by the students. Recall is most effective when all the students are called on to recall, since an effort of will is required. This self-activity is important and is not something that can be delegated to a few who do the recall. Students can be asked to recall with their neighbour in pairs, or each makes brief notes, a mind-map or sketch. The recall has a number of functions, including the opportunity for each student to make a subjective, affective and intentional connection to the material, to correct misapprehensions, share and compare impressions and finally to formulate the essence of the experience from a historical perspective, that is, answering the question, what did this mean? Ultimately the development of historical consciousness depends on the processes of recall, discussion and forming concepts. Recall in history lessons of necessity requires a large amount of time, which has to be planned in.

Illustrating events is a good way to combine imagination and practical activity. This can be aided by historical images, if necessary, but one can also re-enact key moments in small

groups, which avoids privileging students who are good with words, and calling on embodied experiences, thus enhancing the process of identification.

When it is occasionally stated in descriptions of Waldorf lessons that the student's main-lesson book replaces the textbook (during the class teacher period), this leads to the misunderstanding that the contents of the book resemble what a textbook would offer. Of course, it is a goal that the content is an accurate reflection of what has been dealt with in the lessons, but the main-lesson book always reflects the level of learning and development of the individual students, indeed that is the point. The students should learn to organize the material in their books, with captions, titles and a clear structure of themes. If they learn to do this, they will experience pride in their work and understand its purpose, which is document and retain important information, in the same way that early cultures recorded their important information in symbols, images and text. The main-lesson book is an instrument that supports the student's learning by representing in self-formulated texts, what the student has understood, or organizing material (maps, graphs, images etc.). The practice of copying the teacher's texts from the blackboard (presumably to ensure that the important content is recorded) is a waste of good learning time and an extra burden for students with reading or writing weaknesses. If teachers want to give students texts that are important, then there are other means of doing this. Writing their own texts and drawings (including maps) supports appropriation and memory processes.

Visiting historical locations and museums is another important aspect of history learning wherever this is possible. Museum pedagogy has improved immensely in recent years and many museums provide excellent information about the exhibits and their context and even appropriate activities.

Criteria for focus

In choosing which aspects of history to address it is important to bear the following criteria in mind:

1. Geography- e.g., the relationship of human societies to their locality, its geographical features, climate, plant and animal life, and resources for human activities.
2. Economy- e.g., how societies sustained themselves, how they used local resources for food, shelter, making things, how they traded with other people.
3. Social structures- e.g., the kind of societies people had, from small egalitarian bands to tribal systems, to chiefdoms, hierarchical theocracies, empires, nation states, etc.
4. Culture- e.g., including religion, relationship to the spiritual world, the arts, architecture and technology.
5. Political life and the law.
6. Intercultural relations- societies have rarely existed in isolation from other cultures (even the past is another culture) , so it is important to show how cultures learned from each other, absorbed influences and ideas, had children together, and (quite often) fought against each other.

This expanded focus provides a basis for understanding the modern and globalized and postmodern world and the struggle to maintain democracy and civil rights in the high school.

These subject-related criteria are one side of the lesson planning process. The other side are the developmental tasks and themes for the age group. If we choose a particular topic in history or a particular mode to learning, we also need to ask; which aspects of the development of the person do these curriculum choices address?

Furthermore, we always need to take an interdisciplinary perspective into account. Which other skills are we using when we teach history? What background knowledge from other fields would be helpful, such as scientific or technical knowledge? Which other languages would be useful? What literacy skills are needed (note taking, report writing, descriptive writing skills, accessing, gathering and selecting background information, reading maps, tables, graphs, statistics, etc)? Class teachers to some extent can plan this more easily since they are responsible for most of the other subjects. In the high school this requires coordination with other teachers- a physics or technology teacher, a musician, an art teacher, biology, chemistry and perhaps most important, geography (especially human geography). This requires not only communication and collaboration with other teachers but often possible changes to the curriculum. For example, to teach human origins in grade 10, anatomical and neurological knowledge of upright walking, language acquisition, and certainly genetics. This kind of cooperation requires flexibility, particularly regarding curriculum.

Therefore, we can structure the planning of a history block using the following model: nature, culture, developmental themes and the scientific knowledge required. On the following page is an example from grade 10.

Interdisciplinary Curriculum – History and Cultural Studies

Grade 10 – Teaching Unit: Origin of Humans

Perspective of Human Development	Cultural Dimension	Development-Related Guiding Questions and Topics	Scientific Reference Disciplines and Sources
Consequences of upright bipedal walking (freeing of the hands, width of the pelvis and its significance for the birth process)	Tools and artifacts	Origin of humans	Archaeology
Human genetics (mitochondrial DNA as a dating method; evolutionary lines of hominids and humans)	Emergence of language and communication	Birth as a fundamental human experience	Genetics
Cognitive development of humans	Social forms of organization	Death and mortality	Human biology
Physical prerequisites for language	Cultural forms of expression	Relationship of humans to nature	Human geography
Duration and significance of childhood	Art	Development of consciousness	Scientific dating methods (natural sciences)
	Myths	Spirituality	Mythology
	Economic forms	Relationships between people	Comparative anthropology / ethnology
	Forms of housing	Conflict and war	Paleobotany
		Development of judgment	History of science
		Development of the ability to independently research and present topics	

A conflation of storytelling and history

One of the problems that we need to overcome in the history curriculum is the distinction between the narrative curriculum made up of stories (magic tales, folktales, fables, legends and myths) that class teachers tell in the main lesson (or indeed in any lesson in which stories are told), and the teaching of history. In many parts of the Waldorf movement storytelling and a certain canon of stories is seen as a core feature of Waldorf education, and any suggestion that we teach history from grade 5 onwards, instead of telling the wonderful myths that have traditionally been told in this grade is met with disbelief and accusations that the heart is being taken out of Waldorf.

The individual grades

Grades 1 & 2

Children learn through stories that people in the past lived different lives to our lives today. They understand about generations and the passage of time in a general sense, marked for example, by birthdays, festivals, seasons. This does not involve a clear chronology but rather a sense of the past in relation to the present, and phrases such as ‘in olden times’, ‘once upon a time’, ‘long ago’.

Grade 3.

Creation myths give a sense of origins and time. Legends and myths tell of times past and the notion of social and cultural change and difference. In those main lesson blocks in which children learn about how human communities provide for their basic needs such as housing, food, clothing, the emphasis is generally on tradition forms, rather than modern building and farming methods. This mediates a sense simpler, smaller scale social structures, closer connection to the natural environment and its resources. In settler-countries this is an opportunity to show the differences between, for example European ways of life and indigenous ways. In North America, one can show how Native Peoples used the ‘three sisters’ farming method (maize, beans and squash together), how their societies were structured in a more egalitarian way, and the generally equal status of women and the kind of homes, clothing and tools they made. The colonizing settlers brought other farming methods and house building styles, often unsuited to the climate and had to learn from the Natives.

Grade 4

The curriculum for this grade includes the home surroundings main lesson block, which explores the locality of the school, and this of course involves historical concepts. Why did people settle here? What natural resources were available? What did people do here in the past? How did they use the land and its resources, waterways, harbours, etc.? Story material continues to provide incidental pictures of people in the past and their lives and livelihoods. Just as the children learn to orientate themselves in space using the compass and making maps, in the following class they can start to experience how historical time is mapped out.

The themes in the lower school are all based on the local and cultural and place, though elements of other cultures can be addressed in stories.

Grade 5

Developmental themes

In grade 5 there is a transition from informal to formal history lessons. The aim is to acquire knowledge about ancient cultural forms, their mythologies, their geographical conditions, their social forms, ways of thinking and special achievements, as well as basic technical

terms. In their awakening consciousness, the children form ideas about the transformation of human cultures from the stage of a life in harmony with nature (e.g. as portrayed in creation myths) to the sedentarism, the cultivation of livestock, horticulture and agriculture, to the early theocratic advanced societies with a division of labour, organized science and technologies and social stratification, against the background of a rich mythological explanation of existence.

At this age, the aim is still to include human deeds in the depiction of cultural development, but also the mythical self-portrayals of the respective cultures (e.g., Brahma, Gilgamesh) as well as the way in which the people of early times and antiquity saw themselves integrated into the cycles of the year. Methodologically, care should be taken not to convey vague images, but to give the children opportunities to marvel at the achievements of these societies. Abstract information should be avoided; instead, lessons should be organised in such a way that children of this age can connect their feelings, their amazement and their interest in pictorial representations.

Wherever possible, the lessons should take account of the different cultural backgrounds of the children in the class wherever this seems appropriate, though care should be taken not to suggest that a child, for example, with an Arabic or Indian background is in some way a representative of this culture.

In grade 5 the students should become familiar with specific historical concepts (Steiner's original suggestion in the curriculum lecture 6th September 1919, was, "In the fifth school year, all efforts will be made to start with truly historical concepts for the child". These historical concepts can include,

- The fact that history includes stories about the past.
- The fact that aspects of the past are still with us.
- The experience that in pre-industrial times people had to provide themselves with everything that they need for their livelihood, though a few things might have been traded. This means that they had to know their environment very well and learn to use the mineral, plant and animal resources it provided. This can happen in ways that are respectful of nature, and it can happen in ways that harm the ecological balance, and this process started long before the Anthropocene.
- People in prehistoric times lived in small family bands, with occasional contact with other bands. When these groups met it was a time for exchange of news, information, resources and probably partners, since people generally didn't have children with close relatives.
- Human beings' greatest skill was their ability to learn from each other and to cooperate.
- The way people relate to their environment shapes the stories they told including myths, which often express the origins of this relationship.
- Prehistoric people probably had a mythic/magical or participatory consciousness. This meant they felt embedded in the world and made no distinction between the material and the spiritual worlds. The landscape, the rocks, the plants and animals were all experienced as fellow beings, often in kin relationships. In kin relationships beings give each other gifts and owe each other gratitude. Practically everything they did had spiritual significance and was embedded in ritual. People in prehistory clearly had metaphysical questions about birth and what went before it and what happens after

death, as we can see in their burial practices and their interest in birth as shown in their art.

- Learning about the different ways people lived as hunters, foragers, herders, farmers and the different consciousness that attends each of these activities.
- The significance of becoming sedentary, living in villages, towns, and cities, and how these inhabited places were connected.
- The way religions expressed the changes in consciousness, e.g., the temple of church becomes the house of God or the gods, the significance of pilgrims pathways, the ways religions often looked back to an earlier time.
- History is not always a single linear stream but includes cycles and multiple strands that are not necessarily chronological. Many non-Western cultures had complex and varied understandings of time.
- Modern understandings of the past use scientific data and oral traditions of indigenous people. In many traditional and indigenous communities, caring for the past and transmitting knowledge of it, is seen as an important cultural function. Narratives and practices are passed on orally and using symbols. As contemporary Native Americans and Australian Indigenous People often point out, their ways of explaining the past are as valid as modern scientific methods and start with a sense of gratitude and responsibility towards the land they inhabit. When we draw on these resources, we should do so with care that the sources we use are authentic (i.e., not recorded by Europeans insensitive to the problem of cultural appropriation) and with respect that these stories have deep meaning for the people who tell them. This is a difficult issue for Waldorf teachers who want quick access to such information. In grade 10, one should discuss the merits of science, myth and revelation (i.e., in religious texts, the spiritual insights of Rudolf Steiner) as sources, in grade 5 this discussion should be conducted by the teachers and kept out of the classroom.

These historical concepts start to be introduced in grade 5 but of course develop through the curriculum over the following years. However, it is good to have in mind, the kind of historical concepts that weave through the spiral curriculum.

Using simplified descriptions of prehistorical people and early societies, the children can be given a series of lively pictures of different life forms. As indicated above in the graphic showing the overall structure of history teaching, the narrative strand runs through all grades and stories in the form of mythologies can provide a background to history lessons. However, these should not be confused with, or replace, the development of historical concepts. In grade 10 it is possible to analyze myths to identify what historical information we can indirectly gain from them, but this is not the task of teaching history in grade 5 and upwards. Just as orality and oracy provide a different but equally valid ways of representing the world, so too do myths and the science of history. Both involve narratives that structure and make sense of the accounts, but myths draw on imaginations whilst history draws on interpreted evidence, causality, correlations, and scientific method. It is important that the students.

Prehistorians define prehistory as the story of human beings from the evidence of earliest tool use (about 3.3 million years ago) up to the point when society started recording their history using written documents, whilst acknowledging that although this started some 5000 years ago, literacy is a very recent skill for many cultures. Prehistory as a science mainly involves archaeologists, but also, biologists, geographers, geologists, zoologists, among others.

Though human prehistory reaches as far back as first tool use, I suggest that for grade 5 the history lessons should focus on the transition from foraging cultures to the origins of animal and plant domestication and food production and include urbanized, literate state-organized societies. We should also focus on the most recent prehistory because the evidence base is strongest. The term prehistory may suggest that there was no before history that, that is relevant to us. Perhaps a better term would be deep history because the period in question, though spanning a vast period, marks an important phase of humanity, that did much to shape who we are as human beings, and which in many ways has been buried by a literate modernity. Deep history is also deep within us.

The recommended sequence of cultural forms includes:

- Hunter-gatherer / gatherer-hunter communities,
- Nomadic herders, pastoralists,
- Early horticulturalists and farmers, decentralized and non-hierarchical villages and communities, networks of communities,
- Towns and larger urban centres with centrally organized harvesting, storing and distribution of food and other materials, increasing use of technology,
- Theocratic states, with stratified societies, division of labour, using writing and other systems of recording and storing information, states based on slave-labour and warfare.

Children in grade 5 come to the subject of prehistory and early states with a basic understanding of human need for food, shelter, tools and community, thus they can be helped to imagine a world in which nature was the chief provider and that only gradually people began to manipulate the natural world to their own benefit. Obviously, the archaeological evidence of the origins of human societies and ways of life, is based mostly on the interpretation of material fragments, using process that are far too complex to explain in grade 5. Nor are students in a position to judge the endlessly changing interpretations of the evidence. Even the interpretations of major finds such as Gobekli Tepe have changed radically over the past 20 years, so these issues are best left to grade 10.

Therefore, in grade 5 we need to draw on generally reliable and well-established presentations of prehistory and early history, in order to make them accessible to 11-year children. The important thing is to avoid reproducing ethnocentric, Eurocentric, imperialist and colonialist, or even Marxist readings of the so-called 'Neolithic Revolution'. Today we know that the past was more intercultural than earlier generations thought, and that cultural change was not a simple series of steps towards higher civilization. We know that climate change was far more significant on human societies than earlier histories acknowledged. So what can we tell?

Creation myths from many different cultural sources offer a range of imaginative accounts of the insights that peoples had and these complement scientific accounts in many ways, including highlighting the meaning of the symbols and religious practices of those cultures. The same is true of the art and artifacts of prehistoric people. Even if we do not know the specific meanings of Ice Age Art, for example, we can share the fact that they were symbolic in character, showing what their makers felt was important enough to risk enter deep into a cave, which may also have been visited by powerful and dangerous cave bears and lions. Copying the art of hunter-gatherer people, including rock and cave art can help the children experience something of the consciousness of these people, without having this art explained.

Grade 5 is not the place, however, to discuss the possible interpretations, but merely to present the phenomena in the context of what we do know about those people and their environment.

Recommendations for creation myths include:

North America

Haudenosaunee myth of Skywoman and Turtle Island

Northwest Pacific Coast myth of Thunderbird and the Whale, the Transformer, the Great Flood,

Inuit myth of Raven

South America

The Mayan Popul Vuh creation myth

Inca myth of Viracocha and the story of the Flood

Aztec myth How we came to the fifth World (Como vinimos al quinto mundo)¹⁸

Africa

West African Yoruba myth of Obatala who created the world we live in

The Khoi-San myth of Kaang who created an upper world and a passage so that people and animals could enter this world.

The Abaluyia people of Kenya's myth of Wele Xababa

Chinese Myth

The myth of Pan Gu

Tao-Te-Ching account of creation

Songs of Chu and the origins of Ying-Yang

Indonesia

Dayak indigenous myth of how Middle Earth arose out of a cosmic battle

The Batak myth of the children of Mula Jadi

Javanese myth Tantu Pagelarian and the origins of the island of Java and the story of Aji Saka, the first king of Java

Pacific, Polynesia and Hawaii

Ta'aroa the creator in the mythology of the Society Islands

Polynesian myth of Maui

The Hawai'ian myth of Pele and Hi'iaka, the gods Kane, Ku, Lono and Kanaloa

Maori myth of Rangi and Papa, the parents of the gods, humans and all forms of life- Maori

Australia

Aboriginal story of Wandjina, the Creators and the Dreamtime

¹⁸ <https://www.thelogonauts.com/2015/09/creation.html>

The myth of Baiaame, the Sky Father and Birrahgnooloo his wife who gave the first rules to people

Japan

The myth of Tenchi-kaibyaku (creation of heaven and earth)

India

The story of Brahma in the Purusha Sukta in the Rigveda

Mesopotomia

The Eridu Genesis and the creation by Enki

The Babylonian myth of Enuma Elish and the gods Tiamat and Apsu

Egypt

Myth Atum, Shu and Tefnut who gave birth to the earth god Geb and sky goddess Nut.

Greece

Myth of Chaos, Gaia and Eros

The historical problem of history in grade 5

Steiner was insistent that no esoteric knowledge should be taught in the Waldorf School, not least because it was a school for all children and not just for anthroposophists. He made this very clear, for example in a parents' evening on 13th January 1921.¹⁹ As Michael Zech (2012, 2020)²⁰ has pointed out, there is no doubt that the early history teachers in the Waldorf movement in Germany (such as E. Karl Stockmeyer, Walter Johannes Stein, Erich Gabert) and up unto the 1990's (e.g. Christoph Lindenberg) interpreted Steiner's cultural-historical approach to history as a global cultural evolution in the sense Steiner outlined in his descriptions of cultural history, as a progressive movement towards the emancipation of the individuality, to self-consciousness, and to modern state forms. This has remained typical of history teaching in Waldorf up until today.

Steiner outlined a sequence of post-Atlantean cultural epochs, with a cosmically determined cycle, providing exact dates:

1. Ancient India epoch (7200-5100 BC)
2. Ancient Persia epoch (5100-2900 BC)
3. Egyptian/Babylonian Chaldean epoch (2900-747 BC.
4. Greek Roman epoch (747 BC- 1413 AD)
5. Modern epoch (1413-3573).

¹⁹ Steiner, R. (1996). *Rudolf Steiner in the Waldorf School: Lectures and addresses to children, parents and teachers*. Anthroposophic Press, p.79: "You absolutely do not need to be afraid that we are trying to ... drum any anthroposophical or other dogmas into the children. That is not what we have in mind. anyone who says we are trying to teach the children specifically anthroposophical conviction is not telling the truth."

²⁰ M.M. Zech (2012) *Der Geschichtsunterricht an Waldorfschulen*, and (2020). *History in Waldorf Schools. Creating an individual consciousness of history*. Pädagogische Forschungstelle Kassel.)

The last three epochs are associated with the development of the inner development of the human being coinciding with the development of the sentient soul, intellectual and consciousness soul, and a systematic emergence of consciousness moving from collective mythical, pictorial, to more individual intellectual and self-conscious modes of consciousness. Apart from being major oversimplification, there little evidence to link the earlier epochs with historical fact. The descriptions Steiner gives of Atlantis, Ancient India and Persia also bear little relation to archaeological and prehistorical fact and have no place in history lessons. Nor should the teaching show spurious connections to stories of Krishna and Arjuna from the Bhagavad Gita, let alone Buddha, in the earliest period, known as Ancient India, nor to Zarathustra when teaching about Ancient Persia (Mesopotamia).

What has also changed is that the subject of history and the didactics of history in mainstream education have realized that the Eurocentric narrative of cultural epochs starting in the East/Orient but coming to higher development in Europe, was a colonial perspective that ignored the facts of history. Above all it ignored China and Southeast Asia and the cultures of the pre-Columbus Americas and Africa. This point was clearly made by Michael Zech in his PhD Dissertation published in 2012. In 2020, I published a short article on the Waldorf Resources website offering guidelines for decolonizing the curriculum, though without a full explanation as to why this was necessary, as a follow up to various texts I had published calling for teachers to adapt their curriculum to their geographical space and cultural times (Rawson, 2020)²¹. Since then, history teachers and class teachers in many countries have been working on de-colonizing their curriculum.

This means that we should only teach knowledge in Waldorf schools that is part of the broad scientific and cultural consensus and is widely accepted at the current time. Of course, history and particularly pre-history is continuously changing as new discoveries are made and new dates are established. Nevertheless, the broad narrative- and this is what we are dealing with in grade 5- is clear and only the dates and details change.

The problem with teaching the cultural epochs as outlined, for example in Charles Kovacs books, is that it is based only anthroposophy and has very little relationship to historical facts. In fact, the problem with the traditional history curriculum is not so much Steiner, as the history teachers over past generations, who have, as most historians of their generations, assumed the Eurocentric narrative about civilizations. It is worth quoting Josephine Quinn, Professor of Ancient History at the University of Cambridge, who points out that seeing the Greeks and Romans as the sole origins of European civilization “impoverishes our understanding of our own world”.

Greeks and Romans had their own histories, rooted in other places and older peoples, and they adapted most of their ideas and technologies from elsewhere; law codes and literature from Mesopotamia, stone sculpture from Egypt, irrigation from Assyria and the alphabet from the Levant. They knew this, and they celebrated it. Greeks were also well aware that they shared the Mediterranean with others- Carthaginians and Etruscans, Iberians and Israelites- and that they lived alongside more powerful

²¹ Rawson, M. (2020). De-colonizing your curriculum- some tips for auditing. *Waldorf Resources*, 2020. Retrieved 18.10.2020, from http://www.waldorf-resources.org/single-view?tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=8582&cHash=2dbc788a2edf780c3204815255941972

empires to the East. Their legends link Greek heroes to the queens, kings and gods of foreign lands, both real and imagined: Phoenicians, Phrygians, Amazons. Rome's foundation myth meanwhile made the city a place of asylum for refugees, while the Roman poet Catullus can imagine travelling with friends to India, Arabia, Parthia, Egypt and even to the Britons at the edge of the world (Quinn, 2025, p. 2).

It is sobering from a Waldorf perspective to read what she says about Western imagined ideas of peoples, biological races, cultures and civilizations. "Migration, mobility and mixing are hard-wired into human history...It is not *peoples* that made history, not *people*, and the connections they made with one another ...Distinctive local cultures come and go, but they are created and sustained by interaction- and once contact is made, no land is an island" (Ibid. p9-10).

Steiner did not say that the Waldorf School should teach the cultural epochs that he outlined in his early theosophical works (such as Occult Science). What he said was that "In the fifth school year, all efforts will be made to start with truly historical concepts for the child" (in the first lecture on curriculum on 6th September, 1919²²).

The second problem is that the story-telling curriculum and the history curriculum have been conflated. They are blended together and not distinguished, especially in grade 5, where the myths are taken as history. Class teachers, who are not specialist historians, need in particular to ensure that they are not drawing on out of date theories (e.g., Thor Heyerdahl's theories about Easter Island, which are not only wrong but racist, since he believed that primitive Polynesian people could not be responsible for complex art and culture). This also includes theories of Atlantis, which as Brian Fagan and Nadia Durrani (2023, 11) call pseudo-archaeology. They point out that Atlantis, "still haunts archaeology, a vanished state that promises untold wealth to its fortunate discoverers. No one has found it, of course, because it simply does not exist, despite an average of a new claim a year". In Waldorf education, the main source is Steiner. The stance I take in this paper is that if Steiner is the primary source for historical information, do not rely on it. This is not to say that Steiner was wrong about Atlantis, or any other period of prehistory, but simply that it is inappropriate to teach children anthroposophical content that is not recognized by mainstream science. We must also beware that nationalisms of all kinds often make claims about the history of their people that are not backed up by science. Hindu nationalists claim the origins of their exclusive view lie in the Indus Valley Civilization, for which there is no conventional evidence.

The children can learn about the earliest human communities in their region who were nomadic hunter-gatherer communities (some prehistorians suggest the emphasis was rather more on foraging and gathering, rather than hunting). Since the important aspect is to illustrate how hunter-gatherer people lived and the fact that evidence is not always rich for each region, it seems reasonable to draw on the better-known prehistories.

It appropriate to show the children how recent indigenous people lived, as well as discussing their early history in the region where the school is located. Elements that are important to emphasize are how these people had detailed knowledge of their environment, the properties of plants and trees, the local animals, and their life cycles. Seasonal foraging requires

²² Steiner, R. (2020). *The First Teachers Course. Anthropological Foundations. Methods of Teaching. Practical Discussions* (M. M. Saar, Trans.). Ratayakom. Thailand. A project of the Education Research Group of Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen, Germany and the Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum, p333.

knowledge and planning. Making tools from the available materials, stone arrow and spear points, wood for arrows and spear shafts, tools for cutting and processing hides, plant fibers, natural glues for combining materials (arrow heads to shafts), makes ropes, baskets, nets, bone for sewing needles, fishhooks and harpoons, kayaks, canoes and warm, well-fitting clothing, and so on. Hunting was not just a pragmatic and dangerous activity but a spiritual one too, as the hunters gave thanks to the spirit of the animal they killed and adopted animals as their totems. They experienced the natural world as animate and full of beings and they felt embedded in this world, in which there was boundary between the spiritual and material worlds. As we know from their art and ornament every had symbolic meaning and places were experiences as part of their biography.

The transition to farming and sedentary lifestyles can then be introduced, though it is not necessary to go into the complications surrounding how this transition actually occurred in the various places- that is a topic for grade 10. Being sedentary and having to work and protect fields from grazing animals and other 'pests', harvesting and storing the produce was hard work, which as far as we know was mostly done by women, whilst men continued to hunt and defend the community. Ownership and access to land led to territorial claims and conflict and we have the first evidence of systematic warfare during the Neolithic, the phase of early agriculture. The students can learn how religion and the necessity to ensure fruitfulness and benign weather conditions led to new communal activities such as the collective work on graves, tombs, erecting standing stones, earth mounds, temples and other sacral buildings to maintain the mutual relationship between the ancestors, Spiritual being, gods and other spiritual powers. Examples can be drawn from the local region and from other Neolithic and Bronze Age cultures around the world, including Mesopotamia, Egypt, Meso and South America, Africa and this should be based on well-established archaeological knowledge. It may be helpful to contrast urban cultures with those who were more distributed, such as the Megalithic culture and Polynesia and the mainly decentralized cultures of North, Central and South America. The children should understand the distinction between mythical narratives and historical facts, whilst knowing that both forms of knowledge are relevant and 'true'.

The significance of walled city-states with a theocratic hierarchy and stratified society, usually based on slaves and raiding of surrounding populations, but also the precariousness of such societies in the face of rivers changing their course, drought, plagues of locusts, epidemics and warfare can be illustrated, for example by cultures in Mesopotamia, or the early Han Dynasty in China. Likewise, the significance of the invention of writing and other methods of recording events such as images can be explained. The relationship of such cultures to the afterlife, or the spiritual world can be shown through different examples where this is best known, for example in Ancient Egypt but also among the Inca.

Grade 6

Developmental themes

In the 6th school year, the children's rational-causal thinking is stimulated, but also their emotions (e.g., when ideals of virtue and culture are described). In addition, a more differentiated orientation towards time and space should be encouraged (possibly designing timelines). At all times, care should be taken to ensure that the children develop respect for past cultural achievements - including those of other regions - as these form the basis for understanding foreigners and tolerance in today's globalized world.

The traditional curriculum foresees a period in European history from Alexander the Great, the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages from the early phases to the High Middle Ages up to the Renaissance and Reformation. This remains relevant for Europe, though the links between Europe and the Middle and Far East and Africa would need to be included.

The Roman empire is usually discussed in terms of its founding, the Republic, the Imperial period and decline. The focus is on the organizational structures of a complex centralized society through building projects, roads, the use of concrete in building, aqueducts and the provision of water for urban centres, the army and civic and legal innovations (Roman Law). This is followed by the so-called Barbarian incursions and the period of migrating peoples from Central Asia into Europe. The rise of Christianity out of Judaism and Islam are important themes.

In the European Middle Ages, the central themes are the nature of feudal society and its courtly practices of chivalry, the founding of major monastic orders, the growth of towns and their guilds and merchants, cathedral building and emergence of international trading organisations such as the Hansa and Lombards. Less well-known is the continuing existence of slavery, serfdom and, on the positive side, the role of women, which was in many ways better in medieval times than in early modernity, with the persecution of witches. Recent research has shown that particularly in urban settings, many women in the commercial world were literate and ran craft and trade businesses such as mills, breweries, bakeries and inns.

If we want to include a wider geographical range, there are several possibilities. Instead of treating Europe and Asia, seen as the Orient, as if they were separate continents and separate cultural spaces, we can start seeing a geographical space with fluid and permeable boundaries. Following the gradual implosion of the Roman Empire and the period of migrations into Europe from Asia and the North, what emerges are a number of cultural centres. Traditionally these have been viewed through the lens of what later came to be seen as Christian Europe. For centuries during the early Middle Ages, only a relatively small area of what today is Europe was Christian, and even spread throughout these regions there were also Jews. Outside of Christendom was a wide range of non-Christian populations of Scandinavians, Germanic tribes, Slavs of various origins, and Muslims, also of various origins, as well as nomadic peoples originating in Central Asia and others.

Some specific themes outside of Europe that could be discussed include:

1. The story of Faxian (Fu-hsien or Sehi 337-422 CE) Chinese Buddhist monk who at the age of 60 travelled by foot through Central Asia, India collecting and translating Buddhist texts. He wrote a travelogue A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms (Foguo Ji). His biography contains teaching stories.
2. India, establishment of Buddhism by Ashoka (4th Century CE) and the spread of Buddhism to SE Asia via merchants and missionaries.
3. The story of Mohammed and the First Califates and the expansion of Islam.
4. The story of Christians and Jews within Islamic cities and regions
5. The Crusades from the perspective of Christian and Muslim history.
6. The rich cultural exchange in literature, philosophy, the arts, science, mathematics, medicine and commerce between Muslims and Christians and the large number of translations in both directions.
7. The Reconquista in Late Middle Ages.

8. Biographies of Ibn Fadlan (921-922). Ibn Fadlan came from Baghdad, one of the largest cities in the world, rivalling Constantinople, Delhi and Beijing, a major centre of learning und the Abbasid Califs. Ibn Fadlan journeyed to the Bulgars along the Volga River. On this journey he met contact with Norse people called the Rus. He then crossed the Central Asian steppes. This can be complemented by the story of the journeys and writings of Ibn Sina (1002-21), the famous philosopher and physician, known in Europe as Avicenna, that were highly influential throughout the Middle Ages throughout Europe but especially in England. His works were also influential in Islam since he himself was influenced by the Shia sect, the Ismaeli's who taught that spirituality was aligned with Aristotelian rationalism and the secret teachings of the Quran.
9. Exploring the Silk Road trade connections across Central Asia but also the sea routes around the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific. The Intan shipwreck around the year 1000, the cargo of which shows the extent and sophistication of industry and trade in Asia.
10. The travels of the Buddhist monk, Xuanzang (618-632) tells us both about the expansion of Buddhism in its various different forms and the connections between India, China and Southeast Asia and Indonesia.
11. Ghengis Khan and the spread of the Black Death in the 14th Century
12. The story of Mansa Musa and the Golden Age of Mali. Musa became the Mansa of the Mali Empire centred in Timbuktu in 1312 that controlled the important valleys of the Senegal, the Gambia and the Niger, one of the world's greatest sources of gold. He made a pilgrimage to Cairo and Mecca around 1324 across the Sahara and distributed so much gold that the price in the region fell up to 25% for ten years. He also brought huge numbers of slaves, which alerted the Portuguese, who were looking for sources of both, but especially gold.

The cultural theme includes examples of intercultural encounters, trade and travelers. In grade six, the current German curriculum spans the Roman Empire to the Middle Ages, including the rise of Islam and European encounters, both peaceful and warlike between Islam and European Christendom, and the relationship to the non-Christian peoples of Northern Europe, such as the Angles, Saxons, Jutes and later the Vikings. These encounters often involve a contrast and often conflict between a universal claim to authority, for example through Empire and later Church, with the tribal structures of pagan societies. There is also a contrast between monotheistic religions such as Christianity and Islam and polytheism, and the schisms within major religions between Rome and Byzantium, between Sunni und Shia in Islam.

For Waldorf schools in North or South America it would be important in grade 6 to establish the richness of cultures in the pre-Columbian Americas, e.g. Maya, Inca, Aztec cultures in Mesoamerica and South America and the Hopewell and Cahokia Mississippian Culture, the Ancestral Puebloans and North West Pacific peoples in North America.

At this age the children need opportunities to develop their intellect through applying causal understandings to historical phenomena and the structuring ideas such chronologies and time frames and periodization. At the same time their affective sensibilities can be appealed to through awareness of virtues such as courage, loyalty, fidelity, and a sense for cultural

expressions of piety, devotion and service. These qualities can be personified by significant personalities.

Grade 7

Developmental themes

In Year 7, pupils learn about the history of modern times from the transition from the Middle Ages to the 18th century. In addition to biographical sketches, textual and pictorial sources and overviews, and more specialized historical terminology are now to be taught. The connection to our current living environment must always be established. The roots of the emancipation of the individual as well as the globalized (networked) world lie in the change in the image of the world, earth and the human being. The students can develop their understanding of the economic and political conditions of our present day and can grow into their own living environment and form concepts in order to understand it. They can now be expected to grasp more complex historical contexts on the basis of vivid ideas and by encouraging their causal thinking. They should also be able to formulate their first judgements on historical events. The ability to extract information from images and text-sources as well as the further differentiation of time and space orientation (with a global dimension) are practiced.

The main theme of grade 7 is the transition from the Late Middle Ages to Early Modernity up to the 18th Century. In Europe this period is characterized by the emergence of new technologies, science and rational intellectual life including religious reform as well as religious conflict, colonialism, New World slavery, new forms of capitalism and the theories of racism that emerged to justify these. The new economic model of indentured and slave labour on plantations provided the capital to drive the new technologies that made the industrial revolution possible and led to major social transformations. The Renaissance, Reformation and Age of Enlightenment went hand in hand with notions of individualism and nation states as well as calls for emancipation (initially of white, property-owning whiter men). Understanding these complex correlations and contexts challenges the students to apply their intellect to analyze cause and effect, and also calls upon them to form new concepts to account for the processes involved. In order to be able to do this they also need to be able to develop their powers of imagination to put themselves in various positions and see events from multiple perspectives. The knowledge of early modern history to be acquired in year 7, with the changes in the understanding of the world that took place in Europe at this time, the increase in importance of the bourgeoisie, the constitution of the European nation states and their power relations, should be summarized and reproduced by the pupils in smaller retellings in writing or orally.

The global connections between the various parts of the world become more extensive, not least through European colonization but also through new ideas and technologies. In this we see the need for history to be a social science, taking technology, economics, politics and religion into account alongside culture and biography.

The traditional Waldorf curriculum focus on European developments is actually necessary to some extent, in most other non-European schools, in order to understand the forces at work in Europe that drove colonialism. For non-European schools, their own local and regional histories in the period that saw a transition from the Middle Ages to European colonialism and the effects on this up to the point of industrialization. In such cases it is not merely a matter of aligning dates, but the historical processes, which were undoubtedly distorted by

colonialism. In colonized lands we have the emergence of white-settler nations and other nations that gained their independence through resistance and colonial wars. These narratives will vary from country to country. What is particularly important is that teachers strive to offer accounts that are based on historical facts rather than nationalistic narratives.

Grade 8

Developmental themes

In year 8, the history of the modern era is continued up to the present day. Basic knowledge of economic and social history from the 18th century to the present day is now taught. In addition, an awareness of the increasing interconnectedness of cultural areas and a basic understanding of today's technical, economic and social structures and their impact on people is encouraged. Students should gain an insight into how societies are shaped in the field of tension between technical progress, human and social conditions and responsibility for the earth's habitat and its resources. This means addressing current globalization processes (worldwide networking, the struggle for human rights, shared responsibility for the basis of life and people in need) and the resulting tasks. The difficulty lies in the fact that, in the necessity of pedagogical reduction, developments over several centuries up to the present must be traced using individual examples (e.g. communication technology, transport, industrialization - steel, petroleum, high-tech industry -, energy production, raw material extraction, health care) without getting lost in abstract lists and excessive details. Ultimately, the aim in year 8 is to lead young people to an initial understanding of globalization, its consequences and its roots. They should be increasingly involved in the teaching of the subject matter with short, prepared presentations (make material available!) or contributions worked out in small groups. Of course, this does not replace a competent teacher presentation. In addition to the ability to access sources (offer a wide range of sources not only from the Internet), reading graphics (demographic changes, production and yield charts, etc.) can now also be practiced. There should always be an awareness that history is realized in specific places or spaces, which is why map work is so important.

The period covered in grade 8 is from the 18th Century to the actual present, with an emphasis on social, economic and cultural history, which includes political developments. The gradual globalization of the world is central idea, even if some parts of the world only became connected relatively recently. This is a period in which technical developments have transformed the lives of everyone on the planet and transformed the world from an essentially rural state to urbanization and industrialization. The period was also marked by the clash of empires and political systems, Western capitalism and state communism, between the emergence of democracies, civil and human rights and totalitarian systems, conflicts on a global scale or local conflicts as surrogate wars fed by more powerful states and an international arms industry.

Even if the arrival of the new technologies occurred earlier or later, they have more or less reached everywhere in the world. This included the use of burning fossil fuels as prime energy source, with the consequence of environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity and human-made climate change. It includes, modern communications systems starting with Morse telegraphy and leading by steps to the Internet, modern transport systems. Industrial production, including industrialized food production and latterly the shift of production away from the West to the developing world, the race for control of crucial resources, and all the social consequences of these developments.

It is unlikely that class teachers will be able to cover all these aspects in two main lesson blocks, therefore, choices need to be made that illustrate the changes and their impact on peoples' lives.

Grade 9

Developmental themes

In this grade students should be enabled to start making judgements based on moral criteria such as fairness or social justice. As young people at this age begin to justify moral standards themselves and tend not only to develop such standards theoretically, but also to judge their environment according to them or demand moral behaviour, it is recommended that history is repeatedly reflected on in lessons using concrete biographies. Biographical miniatures can be the starting point for exploring a topic or can be used to illustrate a historical phase. They point out to young people that history is shaped by people, but also how general conditions have an impact on individuals. This is never about heroizing or demonizing historical figures, but about the areas of tension in which human actions and the struggle for values take place. Depending on the concept, such biographical references are established through a teacher presentation, a student presentation, audio or film documentaries, interviews with contemporary witnesses or through source work (practicing techniques of source development and source criticism).

Rather than dealing with such issues in abstract terms in histories it is helpful to focus on individual biographies that illustrate the issue that were prominent at certain historical times, which also helps them to see that history can be shaped by the actions of people such as Rosa Parks, Che Guevara, Nelson Mandela, but not only heroes, the actions of Joseph Stalin or Adolf Hitler can be portrayed. At this age the students should not be relying on the teacher's presentation but should be conducting guided research and making presentations to the class. In contrast to individuals' motivations, the students can learn the outlines of leading ideas in history, ideologies and ideals that drive people's actions.

Since the teacher's presentation is of central importance in history lessons at Waldorf schools, high demands must be placed on its design in terms of factual validity, emphasis, concreteness, professional reflection and liveliness. Above all, it is important that pupils are given the opportunity to make their own judgements about historical events and thus emancipate their own historical awareness. This includes being able to present and comment on the main features of history, learning to use political and historical terminology and discovering historical processes in current events, which is why more time must be given each day in class to discussions on making judgements and forming concepts independently so that the young people's historical awareness can be individualized. In year 9, the formation of historical judgements in relation to the leading ideas and ideals of modern times (human dignity, human and civil rights, democracy and the rule of law) should be encouraged in line with their development. The social and political events of the present should always be analyzed from their historical roots.

Grade 9 covers the same historical period as grade 8 but does so in such a way that modern human consciousness can be characterized, such as emancipation, civil rights, women's rights, gay rights and individual freedoms, but including the question of alienation of working people from the meaning of their work, the struggles of social classes and castes. Here the underlying and radically different mentality of Europeans and indigenous cultures can be

explored. The origins and historical and contemporary forms of racism need to be explored. It is crucial that the students can understand how people who consider themselves civilized can commit genocide or destroy the environment and ruinously exploit natural resources.

The various forms of communist and fascist totalitarianism compared and compared with the various democratic systems, and what accounts for the attraction of each of these systems. Nation building and nationalism is another theme that should be historically addressed and compared with the current situation.

Students also learn how events and personalities are used to serve political agendas, such as the way contemporary American society deals with the actual legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. , and the role of conspiracy theories in explaining historical events.

Grade 10

Developmental themes

At this age the students are usually well into adolescence and are becoming emergent young adults. History is traced for a second time from its beginnings to antiquity. Now there is an opportunity to explore the achievements of consciousness expressed in cultural history on the basis of artefacts, archaeological and historical finds, which can be dated by modern dating and analysis methods. The various hypotheses that arise in this context regarding the spread of human culture, the causes of developments and upheavals (e.g. Neolithic Revolution), the differentiation of social forms and the factors influencing a culture (climatic, landscape and neighbouring factors) are to be reflected in constructive (conclusions/thesis formation) and analytical (questioning/investigation) approaches. On the one hand, the presentation of history is addressed in terms of its origins and content, and on the other hand, the development of simple ways of life into highly complex cultures based on the division of labour and hierarchies. By engaging with the pictorial, mythical and philosophical self-explanations of selected older cultures, the young people are also stimulated to justify themselves and to understand others, as they encounter other world views and forms of encountering the world. It is precisely the study of cultural forms that are obviously based on a completely different understanding of reality that can contribute to the development of intercultural competence.

With regard to the development of a reflective historical awareness, it is important to point out that in the Waldorf school history curriculum, pre- and early history as well as ancient history are not only taught in childhood but are deepened and analyzed once again in the transition to adulthood. For example, by analyzing myths students can understand the value of different kinds of knowledge, such as the metrics produced by dating and statistical methods, historical testimonies, literature and art, as well as analyzing artefacts and field sites and how these forms or knowledge can be represented. Thus, they develop an understanding of how different ways of knowing can complement each other. My exploring how early complex societies used myths the students can learn how national myths, for example, can form part of politics in recent times.

It is essential that all lessons in year 10 are based on the presentation and development of concrete finds, excavations, traditions and landscape and climatic conditions and that students are encouraged to differentiate their historical awareness conceptually by forming and examining theses from inferential and interlinking judgement processes. The aim is to use a

phenomenological approach, conclusions and comparisons to conceptualize cultural formation, development and mental change. This involves both self-reflection and reflection on current living conditions and explanations of the world. Pupils should be encouraged in their independent approach and in forming and defending independent judgements by exploring material, working in groups, in class discussions and in written formulations. This gives their historical awareness the opportunity to differentiate itself and their narrative skills the chance to develop.

Possible lesson content (examples can be drawn from all over the world):

- Emergence of our human ancestors up to anatomically modern humanity and the various theories accounting for this
- Geographical distribution of early humans
- Paleolithic tools, artefacts, lifestyles, culture of early humans
- The archaeology of prehistory
- Origin myths
- Hunter-gatherer-forager societies
- Ice Age art
- Early horticulture and farming
- First settlements, villages and towns
- Urban societies (Greek polis), writing, art and architecture, myths and worldview
- Theocratic societies
- Distributed societies, e.g. Megalithic culture, Polynesian, Native North Americans etc.
- First contacts with Europeans.

Grade 11

Developmental themes

In this school year, the now mostly seventeen-year-olds should differentiate their discussion skills in such a way that facts and problems can be thought through on several levels and divergent points of view can be weighed up. The students can develop their powers of empathy and alterity for other cultures and in engaging with divergent and contrasting ideas. They can begin to appreciate the distinction between ideals and reality, ideas and counter-ideas, intentionalities on different levels. They can apply these understandings to historical processes, philosophies, political ideologies, religions and different cultural streams. It is crucial that they learn to use historical comparisons, juxtapositions, polarizations and the recognize that their own subjectivities are part of their understanding of the other, other cultures and other historical times.

Traditionally the history curriculum treated modern history again in grade 9, though from the perspective of ideologies. Class 10 went back to the period from prehistoric origins to early urban and theocratic cultures (Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece). Grade 11 re-visits the Romans, the Middle Ages up to the Renaissance and Reformation in Europe. This traditional structure has its benefits, through largely from a European and Western perspective. As I have argued in the companion paper, this tradition is self-affirming, like most of the traditional Waldorf curriculum and indeed the topics are all of interest. However, if we are trying to do two things, namely take a less-Eurocentric perspective and give recent history (i.e., world history post-1989) more space, then we have to set new priorities. The curriculum below offers a suggestion in this direction.

The students can tackle some of the more complex themes in philosophy, religion and the structure of society. These do not have to necessarily follow a strict chronological sequence but cover the whole period from antiquity to modernity.

Some possible topics

If we take the overall theme as being the ideas that moved people before modernity from which we can learn, the grade 11 is a good time to focus on the different worldviews associated with the various world religions and philosophies (e.g. of the Axial Age, the Vedas before the Axial Age, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Zoroasterism, Judaism and later Christianity emerged) and their social and historical implications.

In North America one could explore the Great Law of the Six Nations and the Indigenous critique of European ways.

In Europe one could explore monastic orders and feudalism, but also specific topics such the changing role of women between the Middle Ages and Early Modernity and the rise of the persecution of witchcraft.

One could compare different social structures in early complex societies, e.g. different kinds of theocracy such as ancient Egypt and the Inca civilization, the distributed megalithic culture and Mesopotamian urban cultures.

An alternative

An alternative would be to use both grade 11 and 12 to explore all aspects of globalization from an economic, post-industrial, digital age perspective, politically-socially from a postcolonial, post-Cold War/1989, post 9/11 multi-polar geopolitical perspective, ecologically from the perspective of sustainability and culturally from a postmodern, identity perspective. Since these are vital and complex themes for young people to navigate, it would seem worth cutting out the revisiting of the Middle Ages to focus on contemporary issues. There are so many issues that Waldorf inadequately covers (and alumni research suggests that former students felt this too), that an alternative approach would seem to be essential. The areas that have been neglected include:

- politics and political theory, including different forms of democracy,
- economics, the role of capital and money markets, currency trading, alternative models,
- law, rights, justice systems,
- current conflicts in the world.

How this were to be done needs to be developed by teachers locally. The methods used are those already mentioned but should include contributions from experts either in person or online. Such topics go way beyond the skills and knowledge of most Waldorf teachers and 17/18-year-old students are quite capable of adult forms of learning, if given appropriate support.

Grade 12

Developmental themes

In the 12th school year, the students participate in the teaching processes as adults of full age, independently and responsibly. They must be involved accordingly. In this way, they can be expected to actively prepare for the presentation of content or the processing of past learning content. Lessons should now provide an overview and a more in-depth explanation of the subject aspects and open up the educational content of a subject for a self-responsible and socially responsible life. This requires history lessons to summarize the educational process to date with the active involvement of the students and thus to evaluate it individually, to consider historical orders and structures and to reflect on historicity itself in its connection with awareness, questions and the intentions underlying the respective narratives. Above all, this also means that the orientating contribution that history can make in various narratives to understanding our contemporary situation is actively utilized by taking the problems associated with the present as the starting point for questions about history. The treatment of such questions can be characterized by conflicts, wars, crises or catastrophes that are currently coming to the fore or can be approached from a more general perspective. As a rule, these two aspects will be intertwined, i.e. they are by no means mutually exclusive, and history lessons of this quality will help to ensure that historical narration is seen through as an intention-dependent act of consciousness. On the other hand, the possibility of creating meaning from one's own questions by analyzing various phenomena in developmental contexts is tested. This opens up the possibility of independently shaping the formation of historical awareness and thus of historical competence, and since such a historical longitudinal and cross-sectional approach that reflects on historical theory makes special demands and deviates from standard school practice, a possible implementation of this concept will be outlined below.

It has been argued that grade 12 has a special place in the overall curriculum in that it seeks to draw the threads of the previous 11 years together into some kind of culminating overview. This certainly an important function, though in a sense each new year needs to start with a brief recapitulation of what has gone before, in which the essential developments and events are summarized. There is a romantic element in the notion that one can draw all the strands together into some kind of conclusion. Some even take up Steiner's idea of multiple philosophical perspectives on history. The danger inherent in this gesture is of superimposing anthroposophical perspectives on the whole, by suggesting the kind of cosmic super narrative that Steiner built into his anthroposophical view of human and world evolution. On the assumption that this is inappropriate in a school with young people still in an impressionable asymmetrical relationship to their teachers, we should perhaps take multiple perspectives on how history is made, how society can be interpreted and the main philosophical trends of our times, without privileging anthroposophy.

Myths of progress

What is culture? Essentialist versus postmodern, performative notions of culture

Urban civilizations versus distributed civilizations (e.g., Megalith culture, Polynesian,

History of slavery and freedom

Ecological views of history and civilization

Marxist views of history.

Conclusion

This draft global curriculum is ‘work-in-progress’ and is incomplete. But that is the point. History is always incomplete and needs to be continually revised, adding new events, new perspectives and setting new priorities. If the task is to enable students to develop historical consciousness, this is not a fixed, crystalized let alone fossilized thing. It must continuously change to reflect our shifting perspectives and changing needs to understand the present in terms of the past and the past through the lens of the present. This is a globalectic perspective. Quite apart from which, this I expect history teachers everywhere to add, supplement, modify curriculum. This draft marks the starting point of an ongoing process.

March 2026

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